



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

SEARCH LIBRARIES



07487782 4

JOHN DARKER

Aubrey Lee

~~50~~

15



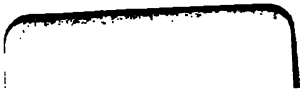
~~152~~

Lee

NCV

~~50~~

15



150



AT ALL THE LIBRARIES.

THE LAST TOUCHES. By MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD.

POSTE RESTANTE. By C. Y. HARGREAVES.

MARGARET DRUMMOND, MILLIONAIRE. By SOPHIE
F. F. VEITCH.

THE CURB OF HONOUR. By M. BETHAM-EDWARDS.

THE GREAT CHIN EPISODE. By PAUL CUSHING.

CAP AND GOWN COMEDY. By ASCOTT R. HOPE.

UNDER TWO SKIES. By E. W. HORNING.

A TANGLED WEB. By LADY LINDSAY.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S WINDOW. By LADY LINDSAY.

BORN IN EXILE. By GEORGE GISSING.

100 100

JOHN DARKER

A NOVEL

1

BY

AUBREY LEE

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1895

Q 1110

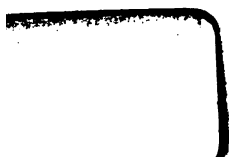


JOHN DARKER



~~50~~

15



—

~~152~~

152



JOHN DARKER



CHAPTER I

A GREAT CRY

THERE were only two other children of my age on board the *Conqueror*—Flora, the captain's daughter, and Polly, the orphan of an unlucky digger, buried at Ballarat. Like Polly, I was a steerage passenger. Unlike Polly, I was allowed to play with Flora on the quarter-deck, and sometimes bidden to feast with her on saloon fare.

'It's your curls, Rosey,' said Polly one evening when I had told her a mouth-watering tale; 'it's all along o' your curls. If mother could only paper my 'air stiff enough, I'd get fresh meat in first cabin same as you.'

But the steerage theory of preferment was not accepted on the quarter-deck, where I advanced it next day.

'Na, na,' said the captain's daughter, whose native accent was preserved all through her journey round the world by constant association with a Scotch stewardess; 'na, na, Rosey, it's no the curls. Mamma says she lets you play wi' me because you

are like a wee leddy. Yon Polly is just a common bit lassie.'

'I like Polly best,' I said, with unladylike candour. 'Polly isn't a bit greedy, and she's far more cleverer than you.'

'Then awa' wi' you to your Polly,' cried the captain's insulted daughter, pushing me from her; 'I dinna want to play wi' you. I like mysel' best. Mamma said I could bring you to your dinner if I liked; but I'll no like, and there's roast pork for the dinner the day.'

She shook a small, skinny, spiteful fist as she vanished into the sacred depths of the saloon, and left me defeated after a battle of which I had not counted the cost.

Should this meet the eye of any one who knows by experience what roast pork means to a hungry seven-year-old steerage passenger, he or she will appreciate my sacrifice at the shrine of steerage friendship.

Slowly and sadly I moved from the quarter-deck towards my own walk of ship life, only slightly consoled by the prospect of telling Polly what I was suffering for her sake, and making in her sympathetic society odious comparison between the roast pork of the saloon and the 'salt horse' of the steerage.

Polly was watching a game of quoits, and I stopped beside her to watch it, not because I cared about the play, but because I was interested in one of the players.

There is a mist of confused memory between me and my fellow-passengers of the *Conqueror*, and I cannot clearly remember the features of the man

whose play I stopped to watch on the day I never can forget.

I only remember that he was a tall, thin man, with a dark beard cut close to a very pale face, and a red shirt open on a very white chest, and that he smiled when he caught sight of me. Then he said something that I did not distinctly hear to a man in a blue shirt who had pushed against him on his way to the side of the ship. I supposed it was something funny, because it was said with a laugh, but the man in the blue shirt was not amused. Instead of laughing, he lifted his hand and struck the bare white chest of the man who laughed. The man in the red shirt fell on the deck, and so many other men crowded round that I could no longer see him. I heard some one calling for the doctor. I heard some one else say that a doctor could do no good, because the man was dead. Then I lifted up my voice with a great cry, for the dead man was my father, and I had no mother.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN IN IRONS

POLLY'S mother took me on her lap and told me not to cry, because my father was gone to heaven, and that he would not change places with the best on board the ship because he was even better off than the captain.

Then the first mate came to the steerage and took me in his arms, saying he was going to carry me to the captain's lady.

The captain's lady took me on her lap, but though I sat on green silk, I did not feel so comfortable as on the cotton apron of Polly's mother, and the captain's lady did not tell me that my father was better off than the captain.

She talked to me about the 'Visitation of God,' and the word 'visitation' clung to my memory because in those early days I was partial to polysyllables, though I could not help liking the shorter word 'Heaven' better.

'Let the bairn bide here,' said the captain; 'she'll be fine company for Flora.'

So I was a cabin passenger for the rest of the voyage, but in the midst of saloon society I pined for the company of steerage Polly.

'Mamma says it's awfu' queer o' you to weary for yon Polly, when you can play wi' me a' the day,' said the captain's daughter, 'and she'll no let the like o' that common bit lassie in the saloon; but papa says you're a fine lassie to mind your auld friends, and he'll let Polly play wi' us on the quarter-deck.'

So, though never permitted to breathe the refined air of the saloon, 'the common bit lassie' was allowed the run of the quarter-deck, and the fun of scrambling for the nuts often scattered abroad by the liberal fat hand of the head steward.

We were all three employed in the delightful occupation of nut-cracking when Polly gave us an account of the sea burial attended by her, while I was kept down in the cabin with Flora by order of the captain's lady.

Polly had a descriptive tongue, and supplied every detail of a much-enjoyed ceremony.

'I saw it all quite nice,' she said. 'Me and mother was alongside o' captain when he read out o' the prayer-book. Mother 'ad a prayer-book too—she 'ad,—and she said "amen" out loud,—she did. I wish you could 'ave seed it too, Rosey. My word! it was lovely. Your pa was sewed up tight in a sack, and then he was carried on a board, and covered up with a beautiful flag, and then he went bang down in the sea with a jolly big splash.'

When I heard of the jolly big splash I began to cry, and let some of my cracked nuts fall from my lap to the deck.

Flora picked them up and added them to her own heap, but Polly took a nut from her own mouth

and put it into mine. Certainly Polly was not greedy.

'Don't cry, Rosey,' she said, 'your poor pa is up in the sky.'

'How can he be up in the sky when he's down in the sea?' asked Flora.

'Don't know,' said Polly.

After all Polly was not so clever as I thought.

'I like fine to hear tell o' yon man in the sea,' said Flora. 'Can you no go on, Polly?'

'I don't know no more,' said Polly, 'but I know about the other man—him as killed Rosey's pa for sayin' "skippin' rope."'

'Was it a skipping rope papa called him?' I asked curiously. 'I did not quite hear that day. Are you sure it was skipping rope, Polly?'

Polly nodded.

'A skipping rope is a very nice thing,' I said doubtfully. 'I don't know why he killed my papa for saying that to him.'

'It doesna matter about the killin',' said Flora impatiently; 'go on wi' what you hae to tell about the other man, Polly.'

'He is in irons—he is,' said Polly, ever willing to go on.

'What like is it to be in irons?' asked Flora.

'He is shut up in a iron cabin,' said Polly, 'and he sleeps in a iron berth, and he's dressed in a iron suit o' clothes, and he gets a iron breakfast, and a iron dinner, and a iron tea. Tom says so.'

Tom was a sailor lad, in whose picturesque conversation Polly took great delight.

'Tell us more,' said Flora eagerly.

'He's a-goin' to be 'anged,' said Polly. 'Tom says when we gets to Liverpool a black flag is to be 'oisted, and the policeman 'll come aboard and take him to jail first, and 'ang him after.'

'Can you no go on?' asked the captain's daughter discontentedly when Polly stopped.

'I don't know no more,' said good-natured Polly reluctantly, 'but I'll tell you something near as nice about my father. Poor father was in jail once—he was—because he stole a leg o' mutton when me and mother was 'ungry.'

'And was he no hanged?' asked Flora.

'No,' said Polly, 'he's dead.'

'Maybe if he wasna dead he'd be hanged,' suggested Flora hopefully.

'P'raps,' assented Polly cheerfully.

I listened silently to Polly's discourse, but I listened intently, and sailor Tom's picture of the man in irons was fastened on my mind for all time.

'He ain't in irons now,' said Polly one day, returning to Flora's favourite subject; 'he's let loose about the ship. I seed him last night walkin' on deck in a big 'at. My word! I ran away.'

'And will he no be hanged?' asked Flora in the injured tone to which the stewardess was accustomed when there was any doubt about cake for tea.

'Oh, never you fear,' said kind-hearted Polly soothingly, 'he'll be 'anged right enough, you'll see.'

'I'll no see,' whimpered Flora. 'Mamma won't let me see. She wouldna let me on deck yon day when Rosey's papa went splash down in the sea.'

Mamma is awfu' unkind to me. She says I canna get my way like common bit steerage lassies. I wish I was a common bit steerage lassie like you, Polly. I'd like fine to get my way.'

'I'd rather get roast pork,' said Polly.

CHAPTER III

'FLORA'S PHILOSOPHY'

FLORA, Polly, and I had stopped our play to watch the strange sight of a steerage passenger in close conversation with the captain.

As they talked they both looked at me, and then the captain beckoned to me.

I obeyed the sign shyly but gladly, for though the tall, grave captain did not often speak to me, his words were ever kind. Flora, as usual, full of curiosity, advanced by my side with all the boldness of a captain's daughter, while the equally curious Polly followed at the respectful distance befitting a steerage passenger walking the quarter-deck on sufferance.

'My bairn,' said the captain, laying his hand on my sun-bonnet, 'we'll soon be in port now, and this decent man tells me he'll take care of you when you get off the ship till you're safe with your friends in Ireland. You won't be afraid to go with him, will you, my wee woman?'

I took hold of the steerage man's hand, and looked up into his face. Oh, beautiful face, though pale and pock-marked, I see thee now through the

mist of years and tears ! God grant I may see thee
in the land

Where loyal hearts and true
Stand ever in the light !

I looked up into the steerage man's face, and laughed as I had never laughed before in the grave captain's hearing at the funny idea of being afraid of Mick.

'Mick is my sweetheart,' I said. 'Ain't you, Mickey?'

'Well, missy,' said Mick, 'I'm your thrue lover, and maybe that manes the same thing.'

Oh beautiful brogue ! How often amid the silvery tones of voice refined and false have I strained my weary ears for the echo of thy true ring !

'I have plenty of sweethearts in the saloon,' I candidly continued. 'I have the doctor and the first mate, and lots more gentlemen, and they save me almonds and raisins from their dessert. One gentleman saves all his figs for me, and I love figs ; but I like you best, Mickey.'

The grave captain smiled.

'You may be proud of yourself, good man,' he said.

'It's proud I am that Miss Rosey is her father's own child,' said Mick. 'He was always thrue to the ould friends—God rest him.'

And Mick, standing with uncovered head before the captain, made a sign that was then as mysterious to me as the prayer that rose from his faithful heart for the soul of the man whose body was buried in the deep.

'And has Flora no sweetheart?' asked the captain, turning to his daughter.

'I hae the best sweetheart o' them a',' said Flora triumphantly. 'I hae got the head steward for my sweetheart. The folk at the table can only get almonds and raisins and figs at their dessert, but the head steward has the key of a' the sweeties, and can get at them when he likes. I get a sweetie fra' him whenever he gets a kiss fra' me. Yon Polly has a sweetheart—Tam, the sailor laddie—and he tells her fine stories; but she canna eat stories. I wouldna kiss a sweetheart wi' no sweeties.'

Some of the cabin passengers were now within hearing, and there was a laugh at what one of them called 'Flora's philosophy.' I remember the word philosophy, because I thought it was the grandest word I had ever heard, and at my request the gentleman who had used it repeated it to me till I could pronounce it properly.

'What is philosophy?' I then asked.

I remember the answer all the better because I did not find it satisfactory.

'My dear child, philosophy is kissing the sweetheart who has the key of the sweeties.'

CHAPTER IV

‘YOU AND YOUR CURLS’

MICK and I were a long time in Liverpool, that is to say, long as time is counted at seven years old.

We stayed at a lodging-house kept by a Mrs. Kelly, who spoke so like Mick that I thought she must be his sister, till he told me she was only ‘an ould neighbour.’

Mrs. Kelly had even a more comfortable lap than Polly’s mother, though her apron was not so clean, and on that lap I generally had the first instalment of my night’s sleep, while she and Mick discoursed with various visitors who never declined his invitation to a ‘tumbler o’ punch.’

I was not asleep all the time I was on Mrs. Kelly’s lap, and the company in her parlour made the mistake not uncommon in more highly-educated circles of supposing that the conversation of the elders is Greek to a seven-year-old girl of average intelligence.

‘Will the child have to swear agin’ him?’

When Mrs. Kelly asked this question I quite understood that it referred to me and the man who had been in irons on board the *Conqueror*.

'God forbid,' said Mick; 'there's plenty more to do that.'

One day Mick went out dressed in what he called his 'shoot o' black,' accompanied by Mrs. Kelly, in a green shawl. I was left at home with Mary Ellen, commonly called 'Mrs. Kelly's little girl,' though she seemed a very big girl to me, and was so unlike Mrs. Kelly, that I wondered how she came to be Mrs. Kelly's girl at all. When I asked Mick why Mary Ellen was not like her mother, I was thus answered—

'The mother was married in England, and poor little Mary was born wid the English accent, so the craythur can't help her quare ways.'

Mary Ellen and I stood at the street door watching the departing forms of parent and guardian. Mary Ellen had many curl papers on her red head and many freckles on her pale face.

'It's too bad,' she said, stamping her foot, 'you are always in my road. I go everywhere mother goes when you ain't here, and now because you are here I can't go to the trial.'

'What's a trial?' I asked curiously.

'Don't ask so many questions,' she answered crossly.

'I only asked one question,' said I.

'That's one too many,' said Mary Ellen.

I was stepping into the street, with a desperate idea of running after the fast-vanishing green shawl, when Mary Ellen pulled me back with one hand, banged the street door with the other, and pushed me into the parlour with both.

'Sit down and behave yourself,' she ordered.

'I always behave myself,' said I self-righteously as I climbed up into Mrs. Kelly's high horsehair arm-chair.

'Oh, you're a great girl,' said Mary Ellen,—'you and your curls.'

Something in her tone suggested that my curls were offensive, and I felt bound to defend them.

'My curls ain't any harm. You have curls too, Mary Ellen, only yours are red, and you've got them in newspapers.'

'*I'll* newspaper *you*,' said Mary Ellen, with strong emphasis on the two pronouns.

'No, you won't,' I said. 'I am never newspapered. My hair curls its own self.'

'I'd like to curl your hair my own way,' said Mary Ellen.

There was a suggestion of mysterious meaning in these very simple words that made me strangely uneasy, and I wondered if it were very much worse to be a man in irons on a ship than a little girl shut up in a house with a big girl who held peculiar views about hair-curling.

Mrs. Kelly's lap was particularly comfortable at the end of that most uncomfortable day, but I did not feel sleepy while the company in her parlour talked over Mick's punch. I lay silent for a long time with my arms tight round her dear, dirty neck, and then I suddenly sat up and asked, 'Is the man hanged?'

'What man, dear?' asked Mrs. Kelly, with an affectation of surprise that might have been deceptive if her wink at the company had escaped me.

'The man in irons,' I said. 'My papa called

him "Skipping Rope," but his name is John Darker, and you are all always talking about him, and I want to know if he is hanged.'

6 'The Lord save us!' exclaimed Mrs. Kelly, making the sign with which I was now familiar. 'What put hangin' in your head, child, at all, at all?'

'Tom told Polly the man in irons would be hanged when we came to Liverpool,' I said, 'and Polly told me and Flora, and we saw the black flag hoisted for the policeman, but we didn't see the policeman take the man to jail—Flora and me didn't. The captain's lady wouldn't let me and Flora stay on deck with Polly. Flora said her mamma wouldn't let her see the man hanged, and I suppose Mick wouldn't let me see.'

Then I jumped off Mrs. Kelly's lap, and stood by Mick's knee.

'Mickey, dear, didn't you and Mrs. Kelly go out in your best clothes to-day to see the policeman hang John Darker? Mary Ellen wouldn't tell me what a trial meant, but I think it means hanging.'

Then I knew I had said something funny, because every one laughed but Mick, who was not given to laughter.

'Mary Ellen, dear,' he said, 'maybe you'd put little missy to bed. Shure, this isn't the soart of talk for a young lady like her at all, at all. Go wid Mary Ellen, missy darlin', like a good little child.'

I suppose I must have acquired the habit of obedience before my gentle Mick assumed the office of guardian, for I did not resist the objectionable

idea of going with Mary Ellen till I was alone with her in the dark passage. Then I was struggling to return to the light and love on the other side of the parlour door, when she said sweetly—

‘Dear little Rosey, come along, and I’ll tell you all about John Darker when you are in bed.’

When Mary Ellen chose to be amiable she had all the fascination of a generally disagreeable person in an exceptional mood.

Her soft words held me faster than her hard grip, and we climbed the dark stairs peacefully together.

Mrs. Kelly sometimes washed my face, and always heard me say my prayers before she laid me down to rest, but the necessity of either ceremony did not occur to Mary Ellen, and I did not press the claims of cleanliness or godliness.

‘I needn’t light the candle,’ said Mary Ellen as she hastily disrobed me. ‘It’s ever so much nicer to tell stories in the dark.’

‘Is there a story about John Darker?’ I asked eagerly. ‘I thought stories were always about fairies and giants, and he isn’t a fairy or a giant.’

Mary Ellen bent over my pillow and whispered into my ear, ‘John Darker is a devil.’

The room was very dark, and somehow I did not think the story was going to be nice.

‘Do you know what a devil is?’ asked Mary Ellen with her head beside me on the pillow.

‘Yes,’ I answered, uncomfortably mindful of a certain impressive Sunday afternoon instruction in the saloon of the *Conqueror*, ‘the captain’s lady said he was a roaring lion; but, Mary Ellen,’ with an

effort to oppose my own sense to what I hoped was her nonsense, 'John Darker can't be a lion, because he is a man. He wore a blue shirt,' I added, triumphant in this proof of his humanity.

'That was before he killed your father, you little silly,' said Mary Ellen contemptuously.

'But he was a man after he was in the irons,' I persisted. 'Polly saw him walking about the ship in a big hat.'

'Hat or no hat, he is a devil,' said Mary Ellen with terrible decision. 'If you were not such a very stupid child you would know that a devil can change himself into anything he likes. When John Darker walked about the ship he was a man with a hat on, but if he walked into this room he would be a lion with a hat off.'

'But how can he walk about anywhere if he is hanged?' I asked, with a nervous interest in the question.

'He ain't hanged,' said Mary Ellen, raising her voice and her head at the same time. 'He's let off. Do you know why?'

'No,' I said, beginning to shake.

'He's let off,' said Mary Ellen, 'because he wants to eat you up. He told the policeman there was a little girl in Liverpool who was very vain of her curls, and the policeman said all vain little girls ought to be eaten up, curls and all, so he let John Darker off to do it. He's looking for you now all over Liverpool, and I daresay he has his eye on this house at this moment. I saw a man in a big hat under the lamp at the corner the last time I looked out of the window, and that's why I didn't light the candle.'

I would have screamed out in my fearful terror, but she put her hand on my mouth.

'Be quiet,' she commanded, 'or the minute you raise your voice he'll walk in and make his supper of you. Keep your mouth shut and you're safe enough. And don't you dare to say a word to mother or Mr. Murphy about what I've told you, or I go straight out and tell John Darker where you are. Now I'm going down to the parlour, and I'll tell mother you're fast asleep and that we may all stay downstairs as long as we like, as you won't wake up till morning. Good - night to you and your curls.'

It was a very bad night to me, and when Mrs. Kelly was arranging my curls next morning she suddenly threw down the brush.

'The Lord save us!' she cried, 'there's gray hairs in the child's head, and she not near eight year old.'

That morning I did not rise from my knees when I had gone through my usual form of prayer.

'Mrs. Kelly,' I said, looking up into her motherly face, 'I want to say a bit more prayer. Can God hear me if I don't say it out loud for you to hear?'

'Yes, honey,' she answered; 'shure He could hear the prayer in your heart if you spoke ne'er a word wid your mouth.'

Then, with closed eyes and clasped hands, I prayed the first silent prayer of my life:

'Please God, take me a hundred miles away from John Darker.'

CHAPTER V

TWO HUNDRED MILES AWAY

I WENT downstairs, wondering how the words that Mrs. Kelly could not hear as I knelt at her knee could possibly be heard so far away as the sky, where God lived.

'You're in a great hurry, Michael Murphy,' said Mrs. Kelly as we sat at breakfast. 'Shure I thought you'd stay another few days wid us.'

'There's nothing to keep me in England now,' said Mick, 'and it's time the child was wid them that has the best right to her.'

Mrs. Kelly turned her motherly eyes on me and the bread and butter, on which I was making an unusually feeble attack that morning.

'Ah, now, missy dear, if you're goin' on your thravels to-day it's a betther breakfast nor that you must be afther takin'. Thry and ait a bit, darlin',' urged the liberal soul as she sugared my bread and butter. 'You'll not go fastin' on a long journey if I can help it.'

'Oh, Mick,' I cried, 'are we going back to Australia?'

'No, dear,' said Mick, 'we're only goin' as far as ould Ireland this time.'

'Is old Ireland in Liverpool?' I asked.

'Bedad, it's not,' and Mick laughed one of his few and far between laughs.

'How far is it away?' My heart beat high as I put the question.

'That's more nor I can rightly tell you, missy.'

'Do you think,' I asked with a choking in my throat that was not caused by sugared bread and butter, 'do you think it's a hundred miles away?'

'Indeed and I think it's more like two hundred mile,' said Mick.

Two hundred miles! That moment Faith struck its first root in my soul, and my heart bounded with the strange sweet joy of the creature rejoicing in the sympathy of the Creator. I knew now that the great God in heaven could hear the faint whisper of a little frightened child on earth. I had asked Him to take me a hundred miles away from John Darker, and now this very day I was going to Ireland, which Mick thought was two hundred miles away from Liverpool, where John Darker was.

My usual breakfast appetite was restored, and I applied it to sugared bread and butter with an energy that delighted Mrs. Kelly and disgusted her girl.

'I hope your friends in Ireland will give you the sugar bowl to yourself every morning,' said Mary Ellen.

'Ah, now, Mary Ellen, dear,' remonstrated Mrs. Kelly, 'isn't it very ugly of you to grudge the orphan a taste o' brown sugar? Shure it's not that soart she'll be aitin' when she sits down to a grand silver taypot, wid all the nice young ladies belongin' to her.'

‘She is such a nice young lady herself,’ said Mary Ellen.

‘I’d like to see you nice too, Mary Ellen,’ said the mother, sighing ; ‘and it’s a young lady you have a right to be, you craythur.’

‘Ah, now, Kate Kelly,’ said Mick, ‘isn’t that foolish talk for a sensible woman? How can Mary Ellen there be a young lady when she is only a dacint poor man’s child?’

‘Thru for you, Mick,’ laughed Mrs. Kelly ; ‘and it must be the sup o’ punch you made me take last night that makes me talk quare this mornin’.’

CHAPTER VI

MY GRANDMOTHER'S GARDEN

'Now, missy,' said Mick, 'isn't Dublin the grand city?'

'Very grand,' I assented, 'and me and you are very grand too, Mick.'

I wore what I had called 'my new white frock' for more than one Australian summer, with a blue-ribboned hat bought by Mick that morning in the biggest shop I had ever seen.

Mick's black suit was enlivened by a necktie of brightest green, chosen by me in the same big shop.

Dear old Mick was as ignorant as I was myself about the laws of conventional mourning, and it never occurred to either of us that the wearing of the green or the blue was disrespectful to the memory of the man so lately buried in the deep.

We had walked a long way from the shops, but I was too happy to be tired. I had a new hat on my head and a pennyworth of almond toffy in my pocket. I was hand in hand with Michael Murphy, and I was two hundred miles away from John Darker.

We stopped at last before a tall, red-brick house,

whose door was opened by a man in a coat of many buttons.

'Is the misthress within?' asked Mick.

'She's not,' said the man in buttons.

'What time will she be home?' asked Mick.

'She's at home now,' replied the man.

'Aren't you just afther tellin' me she wasn't within?' asked Mick.

'She isn't within,' said the man, 'she's without.'

'Arrah what do you mane at all, at all?' asked Mick.

'What I say,' replied the man.

'Could I see the misthress?' asked Mick.

'You could see her if you could see through the four walls of this house into the garden,' said the man.

'Couldn't you say she was abroad in the garden when you wor axed the question?' asked Mick.

'I wasn't axed the question,' answered the man.

'Maybe you'll go now and tell her I want to spake to her,' said Mick.

'Maybe I will if you tell me your business,' said the man.

'That's none o' your business,' said Mick.

'Then good morrow to you,' said the man.

He was shutting the door in our faces when Mick planted a foot in the hall.

'Whatever you do,' he said, 'don't shut out the family.'

'Are you the family?' asked the man in buttons.

'No,' said Mick, 'but this young lady is.'

The man in buttons looked at me.

'Who owns her?' he asked.

'I have the loan of her,' said Mick, 'but her grandmother has the best right to her.'

'What grandmother?' asked the man.

'Her father's mother, Mrs. Plunkett,' said Mick. 'Now maybe you'll stretch them fine legs o' yours as far as the garden and tell the mistress that Michael Murphy from Australia will take it very kind of her if she'll spake wid him.'

The man shut the door behind us this time, and was leaving us standing in the hall.

'Wait a bit,' said Mick.

The man waited.

'Show Miss Rosamund Plunkett into her grandmother's dhrawin'-room,' said Mick.

The man looked at me again, and then opened a door.

'That's the dhrawin'-room, miss,' he said. Then turning to Mick, 'You can go in too, if you like.'

'Not at your axin',' said Mick. 'Go in, missy dear, and I'll stand at the door.'

I did not go in at once. I stood holding on to Mick's hand, gazing into the room with admiring awe.

It was the grandest room I had ever seen, this drawing-room of my grandmother, whose taste in furniture and ornaments had been formed before Oscar Wilde was born to smite the Philistine.

I had been to school in Melbourne, and might have spelt the words High Art if called upon to do so, but I knew not the deep significance of their capital letters, and was blissfully unconscious of my infantine depravity when I revelled in that vision of barbaric splendour.

Then I took courage to make a tour of the room, treading softly on the carpet of pink roses, touching gently a green satin couch, and daring at last to sit down on a small chair of what I believed to be solid gold.

'Now, Mick,' I said, 'you see the queen on her throne.'

My favourite play in those days was one in which I appeared in the character of Queen Victoria, and Mick did duty for all loyal subjects.

'Bedad, it's a little queen you are in earnest this time,' said Mick from the door.

When I began to learn English history I often wondered if Jane Grey enjoyed her ten days on the throne of England as much as I enjoyed about as many seconds on my grandmother's gilt chair.

'The mistress will speak to you in the garden,' said the man in buttons, reappearing all too soon, and leading us out of the house by a different way from the door through which he had so reluctantly admitted us.

The first sight of my grandmother's garden was even a more wonderful revelation than the vision of my grandmother's drawing-room.

I know now that the narrow strip of ground behind my grandmother's Dublin house was a very ordinary town garden, but as my seven-year-old feet trod the short smooth grass between the gay flower-beds, I thought I was in the enchanted ground of my beloved fairy tales.

For it was, I think, my first view of a flower garden, and was such a beautiful contrast to Mrs.

Kelly's backyard in Liverpool and other more dimly remembered backyards in Melbourne.

My grandmother, sitting under a shady tree, was the grandest lady I had ever seen, but she did not seem to me beautiful, though I have since heard that she clung fondly to a belief in her own beauty.

It is possible that she may have had good grounds for her belief, but at seven I had no eye for the points that mark the beauty of seventy.

The fact of her grandeur was quite another matter, and though her nose and chin did not please me, I looked with pleasure on her black silk dress and black kid gloves.

She must be the grandest lady in the world next to the Queen, thought I, who during the seven years of my life had associated more with cotton than with silk, and had never seen kid gloves worn on week-days.

Mick stood with uncovered head before my grandmother—as he had stood before the captain on the quarter-deck of the *Conqueror*.

‘I hope you are well, ma’am,’ he said.

She did not answer him, but raised a gold-rimmed glass to her eye and looked at me.

I have all the clearer memory of the conversation that followed because Mick strengthened my remembrance by many repetitions in after time.

‘Michael Murphy,’ said my grandmother at last, dropping her glass, ‘what is your business with me?’

‘My business, ma’am,’ said Mick, ‘is to bring you your son’s little orphan child, and to tell you what you want to know about the murder on the ship.’

My grandmother threw up her black-gloved hands.

'I don't want to know any more,' she said. 'I read the account in the Liverpool paper. I was staying in England at the time, and I have just come back. Thank God, there was no notice of the affair in the Irish papers. I could not live in Ireland if my friends knew that my son was a steerage passenger.'

'Shure, ma'am, dear,' said Mick, 'wasn't it his misfortune, and not his fault, that he couldn't pay his cabin fare?'

Dear old Mick! He did not think it necessary to say what I heard in after years from other lips, that part of his own small pile of Australian gold had paid for the despised steerage passage of the man for whose sake he had sailed away from the little home farm, so much dearer to an Irish heart than Saxon tongue can tell.

'It was his fault,' said my grandmother, 'and I blame him for it. I blame him for running away to beggary in Australia, when he might have married a fortune in Ireland.'

'Shure the fortune is in the family,' said Mick. 'Didn't Misther Hinry marry that same?'

'My elder son had the estate, and I did not wish him to marry,' said my grandmother. 'You know that very well, Michael Murphy.'

In after repetitions of the conversation Mick would here pause to explain to me that Mrs. Plunkett desired her elder son to lead a single life, because she found it profitable to live rent free at the family mansion, and pleasant to reign as its mistress.

'I see the hand of Providence so plainly,' said

my grandmother, clasping her own black-gloved hands. 'I did not wish my elder son to marry. He disobeyed me. Now he has six ugly children—all girls, and all with their mother's unfortunate complexion. You must remember, Michael Murphy, how all the County Cork remarked on the Anderson skin.'

Mick did remember, and afterwards explained to me that this remarkable skin had prevented my father from marrying the Anderson fortune.

'I wished my younger son to marry well,' continued my grandmother. 'He disobeyed me, and he was killed in low company.'

Then she pointed a black forefinger at me.

'Listen, child. The Scripture says, "He that honoureth not father and mother let him die the death." Your father did not honour his mother, and he has died the death.'

I clung tightly to Mick's hand with a growing fear of the black kid gloves. My grandmother was the grandest lady I had ever seen, but she was not so nice as Mrs. Kelly, who was not a bit grand.

'Ah, then, ma'am,' said Mick, 'is that the way you're talkin' about Mither Arthur, who was so proud of you? Och, many a time it was me that listened to him tellin' strangers beyant the say that his mother was the handsomest lady in Ireland, and that there was ne'er a one at the balls o' Dublin Castle who could howld a candle to her.'

My grandmother smiled.

'Mr. Arthur had an affectionate heart,' she said.

'He had, ma'am,' said Mick, 'and for the sake of that heart now lyin' undher the cowl'd waves, won't

you be kind to the little child that has nayther father nor mother, and is your own lawful grandchild ?'

My grandmother raised a handkerchief to her eyes ; it looked very white in her black-gloved hand.

'I am willing to do any reasonable duty,' she murmured, 'though it will be very hard for me to provide for this child when I have barely sufficient to keep up my own position in society, and my son Henry is not likely to give me any help. You know, Michael Murphy, how mean Mr. Henry always was about money. I often wonder who he inherited his selfishness from. His poor father was so generous.'

Mick did not wonder at all, for as he used to tell me in repeating this part of the conversation, 'Misther Hinry was his mother's own son.'

My grandmother again regarded me steadily through her gold-rimmed eyeglass.

'Who did my son Arthur marry?' she asked. 'Was this child's mother a respectable person?'

'Bedad she was, ma'am,' said Mick. 'The father gave her an illigant education.'

'What was the father?' asked my grandmother ; 'or is he still alive?'

'Yes, ma'am, for all I know,' said Mick, 'but I'm afraid he was rather a misfortunate man after the daughter's marriage. Afore that he had an illigant shop in Adelaide.'

My grandmother lifted up horrified black hands.

'Shop!' she cried—'I'm ready to faint. Take the child away, Michael Murphy.'

'Wait till you get a good look at her, ma'am,' pleaded Mick, taking off my hat. 'Howld up your head, missy dear, and tell grandmamma your name.'

I lifted up my curls and answered, 'Rosamund Smith Plunkett.'

My grandmother's lace cap also went up in the air.

'I suppose,' she said, 'Smith is the name of the Australian shopkeeper. My maiden name was St. George. My two sons were called St. George Plunkett. My son Henry's six daughters are called St. George Plunkett. My son Arthur thought proper to call his one child Smith Plunkett. No doubt he was right. Smith is a more fitting name for an Australian shopkeeper's granddaughter than St. George, and it will help her to keep her origin in memory all her life.'

'Missy dear,' said Mick, 'tell grandmamma why papa had you called Rosamund.'

I gladly welcomed the chance of sounding my long silent voice.

'Papa had me called Rosamund because he said it meant "Rose of the world," and because, if I was a good girl, I would grow up into a pretty lady like his own mamma.'

I was quite unconscious of anything like flattery in my speech. My seven-year-old intelligence did not at that moment grasp the fact that my papa's pretty mamma was identical with the grand lady in the black gloves.

'Listen to that, ma'am,' said Mick. 'Rosamund—Rose o' the world. The child is called after you, ma'am, and isn't she the living image of yourself?'

Once more my grandmother smiled.

'I think the child is like me,' she said. Then she laid her black-gloved hands on me and drew me towards her black silk lap.

'Look at me, little Rosamund, and tell me if you are like me.'

I looked up into her face, and laughed at what I thought she meant for a joke. She was not laughing, but then grown-up people sometimes made jokes without laughing themselves.

'Oh no,' I said, 'I am not like you. I have none of these.' And I pointed a daring young forefinger at certain marks to which I could not then give a name.

The black-gloved hands pushed me away from the black silk lap. I have heard since that my grandmother was morbidly sensitive about her wrinkles.

'You are an impudent, ill-bred child,' she cried. 'I could not live in the same house with you. Take her away, Michael Murphy. She has made me quite ill.'

'Where am I to take her to, ma'am?' asked Mick.

My grandmother rose to her feet. How tall and terrible she looked!

'Take her back to her vulgar shopkeeping relations in Australia. Take her anywhere out of my sight.'

Mick lifted me in his arms.

'I will take her, ma'am,' he said; 'my heart was broke wid the thought of lettin' her go, but I knew it was you that had the best right to her. It's not the like o' me that ought to bring up a gintleman's daughter, but as her own flesh and blood has turned agin' her, I'll do my best wid the help o' God.'

'Go out by the back way,' said my grandmother, pointing a black forefinger to a door in the garden wall.


CHAPTER VII

‘UNCLE MICK’

MICK found lodgings in Dublin with another ‘ould neighbour’ of the Mrs. Kelly type, whose domestic atmosphere was free from the Mary Ellen element, and in her care he left me while he journeyed about the provinces in search of a permanent home.

Among the few earthly possessions I think worth treasuring I have an old, ill-spelt, ignorantly-worded letter that is more to me than the most polished literary gem. It is the only letter I ever received from Mick—the first letter ever addressed to me—the letter that I ostentatiously affected to read to myself many times before I was driven by unsatisfied curiosity to request should be read to me.

‘I have something in my eye that shoots me,’ wrote Mick, after many anxious wishes for his dear missy’s health and comfort. ‘It’s an illigant shop in the fine ould town of Castlerock, and I don’t think I can do betther nor take it. Dear missy, I think bad ov lavin’ you so long widout your ould Mick, but plaze God the pair ov us will soon be as happy as the day is long for the rest ov our lives, bekase



it's kilt I am every day ov my life strivin' to hurry back to you, dear missy.'

I was delighted with the idea of the elegant shop. I thought of the shop where Mick had bought my new hat—the grand, big shop where a tall gentleman in a long Sunday coat walked about calling 'Forward' in a commanding voice like a captain on a quarter-deck.

No doubt the elegant shop at Castlerock would be just as big and grand, and of course Mick would walk about every day in his Sunday coat calling 'Forward,' while I would have a new hat every time I went out to walk in the fine old town.

After what seemed to me ages of absence, Mick came to remove me from the Dublin lodgings to what he called 'our own place.'

'Missy dear,' he said before we started, 'maybe you wouldn't think bad o' callin' me Uncle Mick. We're goin' to a strange place, dear, and maybe it's as well not to let on that we're not a dhrop's blood to one another. It's a quare world, darlin', and there's people in it that might say quare things about you if they knew your own flesh and blood wouldn't own you.'

I was much startled by Mick's idea of changing himself into an uncle. I had read about the uncle who had been so much less than kind to the Babes in the Wood, and I had seen an uncle on board the *Conqueror* who often made his niece cry.

She was quite an old young lady, far too old to scramble for nuts on the deck, and yet she told me one day that she was crying because her uncle said she was too young to have a sweetheart. Another

day, when she was crying again, I saw this cruel uncle shaking his forefinger at her as he said, 'Now, I tell you once for all, I will be obeyed.'

When I had an opportunity of speaking to the first mate alone that same evening, I asked him how that old young lady could be too young to have a sweetheart when a little girl like me had many sweethearts. Upon which the first mate got very red in the face, and said it was because the uncle was an old beast.

So I had formed no pleasant idea of an uncle from either fiction or fact.

'Oh, Mickey,' I protested, 'I won't let you be my uncle, because I would have to obey you.' Then, struck with a bright thought—'But if you like I'll be your aunt, and then you'll have to obey *me*. Suppose you call me Aunt Missy—no, that would be silly—so you had better call me Aunt Rosey, or perhaps it would be even more proper for you to call me Aunt Rosamund.'

Mick smiled.

'I'll tell you what we'll do, missy,' he said. 'You call me uncle, and I'll obey you as if you wor my aunt.'

'Very well,' I said. 'Now, Uncle Mick, go out and buy me a halfpenny stick of chocolate.'

'A penny one if you like, dear,' said the ever-liberal Mick.

I certainly did like a pennyworth of chocolate better than a halfpenny worth, but with the delightful power of command came the not quite so delightful conviction that the commander was bound to show a dignified example of moderation.

'Only a halfpenny stick,' I said firmly. 'Now, Uncle Mick, I tell you once for all I will be obeyed.' And I shook my forefinger like the uncle on board the *Conqueror* who used to make his niece cry.

At the close of a cold, wet day, after a weary journey of many hours in the third-class carriage of a slow train, and a drive of many Irish miles on an outside car, we arrived at the town of Castlerock, that looked old, but not at all fine.

'This is not a grand city like Dublin,' I said dismally as we drove through the dirty streets where a pig fair had been held that wet morning.

'It's a city too, so it is,' said Mick, 'and it used to be a grander place nor Dublin. Once upon a time——'

'That's right,' I said, nestling closer to his damp frieze coat. 'Tell me a story, Uncle Mick.'

'I haven't one, dear,' said Mick. 'Shure you know all my ould stories as well as I do myself, and I've ne'er a new thing to tell you but the truth.'

'Then why did you begin it "once upon a time"?' I asked reproachfully.

'It slipped out o' me unbeknownst,' said Mick apologetically.

'Well, go on telling me the truth,' I said resignedly; 'it will be better than nothing.'

'There's not much o' that same to tell, dear,' said Mick. 'All I know is that the kings of Ireland used to live here, and might be seen any day in the week walkin' about the streets.'

'They must have got into a nasty mess if they wore long frocks like King Solomon in my Sunday

picture book,' I said, with disgusted eyes on the dirty streets; 'but perhaps they did not come out on wet days when there was a pig fair. Oh, Uncle Mick, did they wear real gold crowns on their heads?'

'I'm not sure about the crowns,' said Mick, 'but I know they had illigant stone coffins.'

'Coffins ain't so nice as crowns,' I said discontentedly.

'Thru for you, darlin',' said Mick, 'but maybe there was more call for coffins than crowns in them ould days when they wor for ever murtherin' one another.'

I was beginning to wonder where there would be room in the town of Castlerock for the big shop of my dreams when the car stopped before a very little shop.

'Stand in a minnit, dear, till I settle wid the carman,' said Mick, lifting me off the car and putting me down at the door. Even at this distance of time, I am thankful to remember that Mick's farewell interview with the carman diverted his attention from the disagreeable surprise that must have been clearly expressed on my face at the first sight of his 'illigant' shop. For in this shop there were no pretty hats, no tall gentlemen in long coats, nothing more elegant than soap and bacon, nothing more gentlemanly than a fat boy in a white apron, who, instead of calling 'Forward,' shouted 'Judy.'

There was an answering shout from the kitchen behind the shop.

'Arrah, howld your tongue till I turn the praytee cake on the pan.'

The voice was not sweet in mine ears, but the

smell of the potato cake was pleasant to my nose, and I was beginning to regard my soap and bacon surroundings with more charitable eyes when Mick returned to my side.

'Tell Judy to hurry wid the tay,' he said to the fat boy.

'Come now, missy dear, till I show you the dhrawin'-room.'

I rushed at Mick's extended hand with a bounding heart at the first sound of the word drawing-room. Then my high hopes were suddenly checked by the memory of recent disappointment, and I walked by his side with mournfully measured steps. The drawing-room at the top of those narrow steep stairs would, no doubt, be as unlike my grandmother's drawing-room as bacon was unlike blue ribbon. This blessed state of non-expectancy intensified the delight of my surprise when Mick opened the door.

'I done my best, dear,' said Mick, 'but I couldn't afford to make it as nice all out as grandmamma's dhrawin'-room in Dublin.'

'Oh, Uncle Mick,' I cried, 'it's a lovely room.'

And a lovely room it was, though the disciples of Oscar Wilde would deem it most unlovely. It was a lovely room in the eyes of a child delighted by gaudy glare; it is the loveliest of rooms in the memory of a woman still Philistine enough to exalt the spirit of love above the spirit of culture. Dear, loving Mick! What time, thought, and money he must have sacrificed to his idea of imitating my grandmother's drawing-room! I gazed with rapture on the green sofa drawn close to the red window

curtain, jumped for joy on the carpet of pink roses, and screamed with delight at the sight of a little chair painted bright yellow.

'It's a lovely room,' I shouted, 'and, oh, Uncle Mick, you are a much prettier man than my grandmamma!'

Then Mick laughed louder and longer than I had ever heard him laugh before.

'Don't laugh at the queen on her throne,' I said, seating myself on the yellow chair.

'No, your Majesty,' said Mick, with another laugh, in which the queen loudly joined.

Presently Judy came up from the kitchen with a teapot in one hand and a plate of potato cake in the other.

Judy was a red-faced, red-armed, red-legged young woman, whose only visible garments were a small green shawl pinned across her chest, and a short black petticoat that scarcely covered her bare knees.

I thought she was a very tall girl to wear such very short clothes, and wondered if her mother would make her wear shoes and socks before she bought her boots and stockings.

'If you hadn't bid me hurry wid the tay, Misther Murphy,' she said, 'I'd have put on my Sunday coat.'

'Coat,' I echoed, wonderingly, not knowing that what I would have called a frock, Judy called a coat. Then regarding her bare legs curiously, 'I suppose you wear trousers with your Sunday coat?'

'Av coorse she does,' said Mick, 'and a gintlemanly silk hat.'

'Oh, it's fine sport for yiz both to scandalise a dacent poor girl that never thought to demane herself by goin' out to sarvice in a huckster's shop,' said Judy, with an expression of face that made me think I should never like her as well as her potato cake, which indeed I never did.

Was ever queen as happy as I was that night, pouring out tea for Mick, while he buttered cake for me?

Perhaps it was this extreme of happiness that suggested the other extreme of misery I had experienced on the night when Mary Ellen Kelly talked to me of John Darker.

Mick and I were sitting by the turf fire after tea when my present joy was suddenly thrown into bright relief against the dark background of that horrible memory. Then I dropped the character of Queen Victoria, which I had acted with much spirit that evening, and rising from my yellow throne, I climbed on Mick's knee, clasped my arms tight round his neck, and for the first time since we left Liverpool allowed the dreadful name of John Darker to pass my lips.

I did not speak it aloud, for though we were two hundred miles away from Liverpool, I thought it well to whisper low in Mick's ear.

'Mickey dear, a long time ago, before you were my uncle, some one—I can't say who it was, because I mustn't tell—but some one told me John Darker was a devil; and, oh, Mickey dear, if John Darker is a devil, I think you must be an angel. You ain't a bit like the angels in my picture book, but perhaps angels can change themselves as well as devils, and

perhaps when you flew down from the sky you changed yourself into Mickey.'

There was a moment's silence. Then something like a drop of rain fell on my neck between my curls, and looking with startled wonder into Mick's face, I saw that he was crying. I had not often heard Mick laugh, but I had never seen him cry, and the strange sight was as puzzling as it was painful. Dearly as I loved this man, who was so much more than worthy of my ignorant childish love, I was more accustomed to receive than to give loving flattery, and I was disagreeably surprised by his way of taking my compliment.

'Oh, Uncle Mick,' I said disconsolately, 'ain't you glad I think you an angel?'

'Yes, dear,' said Mick, wiping his eyes, 'it's raal glad I am, only I have a quare way of showin' it.'



CHAPTER VIII

THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER

MICK and I spent nearly three years together—happy years, in which I was his loving tyrant and he was my willing slave—three years during which he was unconsciously laying up the heavenly treasure of an unselfish devotion, whose only earthly recompense was a selfish, childish affection.

I have just written of the first time I sat with Mick in the Castlerock drawing-room, and now I am going to write of the last.

The drawing-room was also my dining-room, where I took my meals in solitary state on all days, except Sundays and high festivals, when Mick dined with me.

At the first start of our life at Castlerock Mick had established the rule of eating his meals in the kitchen.

'I want to be convaynient to the shop,' he said to me.

Not till the time came when I was told plain truths by unloving lips did I know that, while I was eating chicken or chop upstairs, Mick was sharing bacon or herrings with 'Judy and the boy' at the kitchen table.


I was now nearly ten years old, 'wid consait enough for twenty,' said Judy, who was one of the only two people in Castlerock not wholly blind to my faults.

Unlike Mick, who was civil to all his neighbours, but intimate with none, I had a large circle of familiar friends, from whom I received attentions more flattering than wholesome.

Though I played the character of Queen Victoria to Mick alone, I exercised a real sovereign power over the children of his equals, who, while believing me to be a huckster's niece as truly as they were hucksters' daughters, looked up to me as their superior. Turning back the coldly critical eyes with which all of us not blinded by life-long vanity review our past selves, I see no reason for my own ascendancy but the fact of superior circumstances. For while my young friends might not invite visitors into their family entertaining rooms without special permission, that was more often refused than granted, and were generally driven out into the streets and lanes of the city for social intercourse, I had a drawing-room of my own wherein to entertain any company that pleased me, and the power of ordering tea and potato cake for any guest whom I delighted to honour.

I was also more smartly dressed than the small daughters of neighbouring hucksters, for Mick, who, during those three years, bought no change of raiment for himself, supplied me every winter and summer with the most fashionable garments to be had from the Castlerock drapers.

My colonial intonation of voice, which the natives



of Castlerock called the 'English accent,' was at first another approved mark of superiority, and though it soon became a very Irish accent, the fact of my colonial experience was an enduring distinction.

The old inhabitants lent admiringly attentive ears to my tales of vividly remembered Australian thunder and hail storms, and my young companions took special delight in my conversation about Australian grapes as cheap as Irish gooseberries, and Australian peaches as plentiful as Irish potatoes.

'Shure, she's a knowledgeable child, and it's grand to listen to her discourse.'

Remarks of this kind were frequently made in my hearing by parents, who so constantly exhorted their children to 'take pattern by little Missy Plunkett' that I was quite accustomed to regard myself as a model, and was, no doubt, as conceited as Judy said. But the days of my vanity were very nearly at an end on the Sunday when Mick and I sat down to the beefsteak, of which he partook with all the hearty relish of an industrious man unaccustomed to 'fresh meat.'

'Uncle Mick,' I said as I helped him to potatoes, 'church was very enjoyable this morning.'

I had lost none of my early affection for long words.

'I am glad to hear you say that, dear,' said Mick, who had caused me to be instructed in the faith professed by my parents. 'It's a grand thing for young people to pay attention to their clargy.'

I was not high-minded enough to lower my dignity by acknowledging that the clergy of Castlerock Cathedral had received but small attention from me that morning.

'There was a good congregation,' I said. 'Oh, Uncle Mick, if you had only been a Protestant to-day you would have seen the new doctor.'

'It would be hardly worth my while to turn for that,' said Mick, smiling; 'and it's thankful you and me has a right to be that we don't want to be doctored.'

'We shall want to be doctored some time,' I said, —and, alas! my speech was prophetic,—'and this is a very grand doctor. He is a *locum tenens*. Mr. Barry told me so.'

Mr. Barry was the Cathedral organist, who taught me music, for which Mick paid him, and from whom I occasionally received other instruction, for which Mr. Barry's amusement was his only recompense.

'Is that so?' asked the astonished Mick, laying down his knife and fork. 'Now I hard he was only an ould army docthor that Docthor Foley got to take his place while himself and Mrs. Foley wor divartin' themselves in England.'

'He is a *locum tenens*,' I said, with my superior smile. 'I knew before Mr. Barry told me that he must be something very grand, because he sat in the Dean's pew, and his daughter was dressed ever so much finer than the Dean's daughters. Oh, Uncle Mick, I am sure she was dressed as beautifully as one of the Queen's daughters!'

'Is she purty?' asked Mick, with an Irishman's interest in the question of beauty.

'I couldn't see her face very well,' I answered. 'I was too far away from the Dean's pew, but her hat was most beautiful. She had three ostrich feathers in her hat. Mine has only one feather,' and I sighed.

Mick sighed too.

'You'd have six feathers in your hat if I could afford it, darlin'. Shure it's a poor case considerin' who you are that you're not dhressed as illigant as e'er a docthor's daughter in Ireland, even if he is a *local tarems*.'

My discontent vanished under the amusing influence of Mick's eccentric Latin, and I laughed as I corrected his pronunciation. But though he smiled then, he sighed again as he looked at my one-feathered hat when we started for our Sunday walk together.

Why did I not sigh as I looked at his Sunday suit, that could no longer truthfully be called black? Why did I never ask why Mick had dropped out of his once hospitable habit of treating visitors to a 'tumbler o' punch'? Why did I not see then, as I see now, the reason of his three years' abstinence from tobacco? Why did I not tell him on that last of our happy Sundays that he was more to me than millinery? Ah, why indeed? Why are we not all born with old heads on young shoulders? Why do the flowers of gratitude meet for the adornment of Love's altar only spring up on this side of the great gulf that divides present yearning from past possibilities?

'I'll call at the school to-day and pay the bill,' said Mick next morning.

The school in question was one I had attended during the past three months, previous to which I had been privately instructed by Miss Dora Barry, the organist's daughter, reverently spoken of as 'a boarding-school young lady.'

Miss Barry, saddened by vain dreams about a curate who had married a rich widow, and false hopes about a cavalry officer who had ridden away, wisely married a neighbouring farmer, and devoted herself to the education of calves and pigs.

Then as there were no other boarding-school young ladies in Castlerock willing to educate hucksters' nieces, I thought fit to pursue my studies in company with several intimate friends under the direction of Mr. Malone, who kept what the general public of Castlerock called 'a grand school' over his wife's hardware shop.

I did not think the school at all grand, and made odiously candid comparison between Miss Barry's pretty parlour, where I had rejoiced in all the importance of an only pupil, and the whitewashed upper chamber where congregated many sorts and conditions of youth, from the whiskered hobbledohoy, who stretched his corduroyed legs in a five-mile walk from his father's farm, to the infant daughter of the opposite publican, sent toddling across the street out of a busy mother's way.

But the law of compensation asserted itself here as elsewhere, and while I openly lamented Miss Barry's genteel surroundings and refined mode of instruction, I secretly enjoyed the display of my own superiority to present circumstances.

From the first there was a struggle between the schoolmaster and me for the supremacy dear to us both, and I was proudly conscious of being regarded as a victor in the strife eagerly watched by all who admired the rebel, but prudently abstained from rebellion.

We started by a difference of opinion about the first letter of the alphabet, which Mr. Malone, like most Irishmen of his class, called 'ah,' and to which I, true to my early colonial education, and faithful to the later example of Miss Barry, gave the usual English pronunciation.

Then Miss Barry had presented me at parting with such of her boarding-school books as she had used for my instruction, and Mick, according to my orders, had insisted on Mr. Malone instructing me out of the same. Among these books were the once highly-esteemed Dr. Brewer's Guides to Roman and Grecian History, and the pronunciation of various heroic names afforded many occasions of battle between a conceited pupil and a master whose usual course of instructions was more homely than classic.

'Bedad, you're a great little general,' whispered the whiskered hobbledehoy one day as I passed him on my way from the master's desk with a 'no surrender' step. He was about to pay me the tribute of a peppermint drop out of his corduroy pocket when I rejected the offering with the scorn of one who despised peppermint and detested corduroy.

'She'll take it from me afther school when the pair ov us is by ourselves, and it's a kiss she'll give me for it,' whispered the hobbledehoy to a corduroyed neighbour with what seemed in my indignant eyes a diabolical grin.

'William Reilly,' said the schoolmaster, whose sight and hearing were sometimes supernatural, 'William Reilly, maybe you would like to laugh on the other side of your mouth for a change. Come here, William, till you get a taste of this.' And he

rapped his ruler on the desk to hasten the reluctant advance of the hobbledehoy.

Then William, who was not in the least like the Spartan boy in my Grecian history, returned to his place with unconcealed emotion.

The day on which my quarter's bill was due I gave myself very irritating airs of intimacy with the heroes of Greece and Rome, and my master revenged himself by setting me the copy, 'Be not wise in your own eyes.'

Then the class of hobbledehoyes, who generally had a bad time if called up immediately after me and my Brewer, all missed a word in spelling, and were 'pandied' all round with an energy that would have rejoiced the soul of King Solomon.

'Oh, what fun!'

The schoolmaster dropped his ruler at the sound of the laughing voice, and the pupils all turned round and stared at the vision of a young lady and an elderly gentleman standing by the open door of the schoolroom.

'Oh, what fun!' repeated the laughing young lady. 'Oh, papa dear, did you ever see anything so ridiculous as those big fellows getting slapped? Just look at that one with the whiskers! He is bigger than you, papa, and he is actually crying. Oh, how deliciously absurd!'

The young lady spoke with a decidedly English accent, and there was something unpleasantly familiar to my ears in her voice. Surely I had heard that voice before, and yet where on earth could I have met the daughter of the great doctor who was a *locum tenens*? She was a very grand young lady,

but I did not think she was what Mick would call 'purty.' Standing near me, as she did now, I could see the freckles that yesterday were lost in the distance between me and the Dean's pew, and I also perceived that the curls under the three-feathered hat were red.

I had a long-existing prejudice against freckles and red hair, and with the hasty judgment of my age I decided that the doctor's daughter was as ugly as her hat was beautiful.

Distance had also lent enchantment to my church view of the doctor himself; but though I did not admire his yellow skin and red nose, I thought he was more attractive than his daughter.

'Don't laugh at the poor lads,' he said; 'now don't, Helen, my dear.' Then he looked at the confused hobbledehoys with what I thought was a very nice smile, though his teeth were yellow and crooked. 'Don't mind her, my boys; it's only her way of showing sympathy—an odd way, of course; but girls have odd ways, as you'll all find out before you are as old as I am.'

Then addressing the schoolmaster—

'Mr. Malone, allow me to congratulate you on your wonderful power of control. You ought to be the commander of a regiment, sir. There is nothing an old army man like me admires so much as discipline. Where would the army be without discipline? If ever any of these fine fellows go into the army they will appreciate the advantage of having been so well officered at school.'

The master looked, in my scornful eyes, disgustingly delighted with the doctor's compliments, and

his smiles were reflected by the hobbledehoyes, who, regarding themselves as fine fellows under military discipline, no longer felt the smart of pandied hands.

'I must apologise for this intrusion,' continued the doctor. 'I am on my way to see your estimable lady and the last addition to your already numerous family, and my daughter, who has just been purchasing something in the way of curling tongs in the shop below, wishes to inspect your excellent school. May I leave her here while I mount to Mrs. Malone's room, which, if I remember rightly, is a flight higher?'

'The young lady is most welcome to overlook the studies of my pupils,' said the schoolmaster in his most dignified voice.

Then the doctor vanished, and his daughter advanced with her three-feathered hat high in the air.

She was much taller than I was, but she could not be quite grown up, because her silk skirt did not sweep the ground after the fashion of grown-up ladies' dresses in those days, but just touched the tops of her boots.

'Rosamund Plunkett,' said the schoolmaster, 'bring up your copy.'

As he pronounced my name the young lady looked hard at me, and walked by my side to the master's desk.

'Be not wise in your own eyes,' she read from my open copy-book. 'I suppose you have had to write this because you are such a conceited little girl?'

My heart was hot within me, but I spake not with my tongue.

'Why do you not answer the young lady's question?' asked the master in his most masterful voice.

'I don't think she asked me any question,' I said, with a great effort to bring out the daring words clearly and bravely.

'Well,' said the young lady, with the laugh so strangely unpleasant to me, 'I'll ask you a question now. *Are* you wise in your own eyes?'

'I don't know,' I said shortly.

'Rosamund Plunkett,' said the schoolmaster severely, 'that is not the way to speak to a young lady. Say, "I don't know, miss."'

My face was very hot as I answered him.

'I will not call her "miss." It is only servants who say "miss," and I am not her servant.'

The young lady laughed in the schoolmaster's face.

'Really, Mr. Malone, it is strange you can't control this small girl as well as those great boys. Pray, where is the discipline my father admires so much? Who is the commanding officer of the regiment now, Mr. Malone?'

The schoolmaster turned terribly red and then more terribly pale.

'Rosamund Plunkett,' he said, 'address that young lady as I bid you or—' he paused a moment before he brought out the terrible words—'or I will give you a slap.'

I think at that moment my expression of countenance must have matched that of Queen Boadicea when first threatened with the Roman rods.

A slap!

I who had acted the part of Queen Victoria to such perfection on my drawing-room throne! I who for three years had been set up on the highest pinnacle of popular admiration, to be slapped! Slapped before the familiar friends whom I patronised—slapped before the hobbledehoys whom I scorned—slapped before the doctor's daughter, who was smiling spitefully under her now hateful three-feathered hat.

I felt as if the hot blood were bursting through the skin of my indignant face.

For a moment my eyes were dizzy, and then they suddenly cleared, for lo! Mick, my own obedient Uncle Mick, stood at the schoolroom door.

In another moment I was by his side, pressing my burning face against his shabby coat sleeve.

'What ails you, my darlin'?' asked the dear anxious voice, while the loving arm in the shabby sleeve was put protectingly round me.

I pointed my trembling forefinger at the school-master as I gasped out—

'He says—he'll give me—a slap.'

'He says he'll WHAT?' asked Mick, raising his usually mild voice into an angry shout.

'He says,' I repeated more steadily, 'he says he'll give me a slap if I don't say "miss" to *her*,' and I pointed to the doctor's daughter.

Mick, with his arm tight round me, walked up to the master's desk.

'Misther Malone,' he said, 'you axed me tin shillin' a quarter for tachin' Miss Rosamund Plunkett book larnin', but there was no bargain about slaps. Here's the tin shillin' for the book larnin', Misther Malone, but if you want to be after includin' that

fine stick of yours in Miss Rosamund Plunkett's education, I'll settle wid you in another way.'

I scarcely knew my own dear dove-like Mick in his new character of roaring lion, which was so forcible that the schoolmaster's generally harsh voice sounded comparatively gentle.

'Well, indeed, Mr. Murphy, I can't see how I have excceded my duty in the endeavour to teach your niece respect to her betthers.'

'Her betthters,' echoed Mick,—'her betthters, is it? Missy dear, howld up your head and show me where to look for your betthters.'

I held up my head and looked towards the doctor's daughter, who had retired from the desk at the advance of Mick.

He looked at her steadily for a few moments, and then inquired in a tone of not very agreeable surprise—

'Ah, thin, Mary Ellen Kelly, is that yourself?'

Mary Ellen Kelly!

Now I knew why that English accent had sounded unpleasantly familiar. This was the same Mary Ellen Kelly, three years older, and a hundred times better dressed than 'Mrs. Kelly's little girl'; but how could Mrs. Kelly's little girl be the daughter of the great and grand *locum tenens*?

The young lady's freckled face reddened angrily.

'I am not Mary Ellen Kelly, I am Miss Helen Bratton.'

'When did that happen you?' asked Mick.

She tossed her feathered head.

'I don't know what you mean, and I won't stand any of your vulgar Irish impudence, Michael Murphy.'

'Bedad,' said Mick, 'if you don't remember your own owld name you haven't forgot mine.'

There was a loud laugh from the corduroyed hobbledehoy, which the significant rap of the master's ruler against his desk instantly suppressed.

'And how is your mother, Mary Ellen?' asked Mick. She stamped her foot.

'I am not Mary Ellen, and my mother is dead.'

'Ah now,' said Mick, speaking more like his own kindly self, 'do you tell me Kate Kelly is dead?'

'No, I don't tell you Kate Kelly is dead. I said my mother was dead, and so she is, but I daresay Kate Kelly is as much alive as you are. Common people are not easily killed.' Then as the doctor appeared at the door she rushed at him as I had rushed at Mick.

'Papa dear,' she said, catching him by the arm, 'there is an odious man here tormenting me about that wretched time in Liverpool when I lived with Mrs. Kelly. Take me away this moment, papa.'

The doctor looked at Mick, and his yellow cheeks became nearly as red as his nose.

'My dear Helen,' he said, rather crossly than kindly, 'don't make a scene. I don't see any odious man here, and if you were not so ridiculously excited you could not possibly be tormented by any remembrance of good Nurse Kelly, who was like a mother to you; but I will take you away, as I am in a hurry myself. Good morning, Mr. Malone. Your excellent lady would be all the better if she did not worry herself about the outbreak of scarlatina in the town. Get it out of her head, and keep it out of the school if you can.'

The doctor and his daughter went quickly down the stairs, slowly followed by Mick and me.

'Uncle Mick,' I said as we walked home, 'how can Mary Ellen Kelly be Miss Helen Bratton?'

'I can't tell you that, missy honey,' said Mick, 'but I can tell you this much—not a fut you'll put inside that school agin. Shure you have enough book larnin' to last you for a bit, and maybe it's to a grand Dublin boordin' school I'll be able to put you yet.'

The idea of a boarding school was very pleasant to me. I had lately read a delightful story book about a boarding school, where a heroine of my own age was the joy of adoring school-fellows, who entertained her at holiday times in luxurious homes, where pony-riding and strawberry-eating were the order of the day.

'A boarding school would be very nice,' I said; 'but you would be very lonely without me, Uncle Mick.'

'My heart would be broke,' said Mick; 'but what matther if I could give you the education of a lady.'

CHAPTER IX

A GREAT CALM

‘YES, my dear, you have the scarlatina, sure enough,’ said Dr. Bratton, as cheerfully as if the scarlatina were the most desirable of possessions, ‘and so have a great many other little girls in the town.’

‘Ah, but, docthor,’ said Mick, anything but cheerfully, ‘the other little girls has their fathers and mothers to mind them, and this poor child has ne’er a one but me.’

I looked up into the pale face, whose beauty rose from a deeper depth than the pock-marked skin. Then the hitherto unconscious spirit of gratitude stirred in my heart and rose to meet the spirit of love shining in the anxious eyes bent over my pillow.

‘Mick,’ I said, ‘dear Uncle Mick, when I was a little girl, ever so many years ago—how many years is it since I lived with mamma in Melbourne while you and papa were away at the diggings?’

‘Five year, dear,’ said Mick, ‘five year, or maybe six.’

‘Well,’ I said, stroking the face that was marked by time and care as well as smallpox, ‘five or six

years ago, long before you were my uncle, I loved mamma best, and when you and papa came home from the diggings I loved papa second best, and you third best, and now if papa and mamma could come alive again I would love you best of all, my own dear Mick.'

Then Mick put his head down on my pillow and cried; but I was not painfully surprised, as I had been at the first sight of his tears three years ago, because now, at the advanced age of ten, I knew that people sometimes cried for joy, and I felt sure that Mick was rejoiced to know I loved him so well.

'Now, Mr. Murphy,' said the doctor, 'dry up, like a good fellow. Better laugh than cry in a sick-room.'

'But, doctor,' I remarked, 'you must be crying yourself, for I see a tear running down the side of your nose.'

'Cold in my head,' said the doctor, using his pocket-handkerchief. 'Nosey weather, my dear, very nosey weather.'

'Is it the weather that makes your nose red?' I asked, with a curiosity not purposely rude.

'Oh, whisht, missy dear,' entreated Mick, whose Irish courtesy was shocked by what in no way seemed to offend the owner of the nose.

'The weather makes my nose redder,' said the doctor, 'but it is always red. When I was a little girl of your age I had an attack of scarlatina, and it all settled in my nose because I made unfeeling remarks on the doctor's personal appearance.'

I turned my hot head huffily on my pillow,

wondering if the great *locum tenens* talked such nonsense to Mary Ellen Kelly, who was now Miss Helen Bratton.

I have only a dreamily confused memory of the days and nights through which Mick watched over and waited on me ; but I have a painfully clear memory of the first time I missed him from the room. I thought he had not been near me for a long time, but I did not know how long, and at first I did not ask the old woman by my bedside. The old woman was Judy's mother, and so like Judy herself that I was generally disinclined for conversation with her.

'Biddy,' I said at last, 'where is my Uncle Mick?'

'If it's a dhrink you want,' said Biddy, 'there's an illigant pot o' chicken tay on the fire.'

'I don't want chicken tea,' I said impatiently, 'I want my Uncle Mick. Where is he?'

To which Biddy replied, after the interrogative manner of her kind—

'Where would he be but in the shop mindin' his business?'

'He must be very busy when he stays away so long. Is it a fair day, Biddy?'

'Ay,' said Biddy, 'it's a fair day.'

My bedroom was in the front of the house, but I did not hear the mingled voices of man and beast that generally broke my rest on the morning of a fair day.

On the contrary, the outer world seemed strangely quiet, till I was startled by the ringing of bells.

'Biddy,' I said wonderingly, 'why are the bells ringing?'



'Isn't this a Christian country?' asked Biddy, 'and wouldn't it be quare if the church and chapel bells didn't ring on a Sunda?'

'Sunday,' I echoed. 'Now, Biddy, if it is Sunday, how can it be a fair day?'

'Shure every day is a fair day that isn't a wet day,' said Biddy, with a grin that showed a set of teeth miraculously white, considering their many unbrushed years.

In the days of my health Biddy's pleasantry had never amused me, and now in the time of my sickness it irritated me to tears.

'It's cryin' you are for the want o' somethin' to raise your heart,' said Biddy, going over to the fire. 'Wait till I get you a sup o' chicken tay.'

'I tell you I don't want chicken tea,' I wailed; 'I want my Uncle Mick.'

'Well, you'll have to want him,' said Biddy, pouring from saucepan to jug. 'How can the poor man be wid you and he sick himself?'

I turned my wet eyes on her by no means anxious face.

'You tell so many lies, Biddy, that I don't know when to believe you.'

'I tell as many lies as the docthor bids me, no more nor no less,' said Biddy virtuously; 'and now he'll kill me for tellin' the truth.'

'And is it true that Uncle Mick is ill?' I asked anxiously.

'Thru as gospel,' answered Biddy cheerfully. 'He tuk a cowld on his chest the night you wor so quare in your head.'

'I don't remember that night,' said I.

'Bedad, you don't,' said Biddy, again exhibiting her miraculous teeth; 'but them that was mindin' you won't forget it in a hurry. Poor Judy nor me got ne'er a wink o' sleep, and not as much as a tayspoon o' whiskey to raise our hearts.'

'And how did Uncle Mick get ill?' I asked impatiently.

'I'm comin' to that if you'll lave me alone,' said Biddy, with her nose at the jug. 'The Uncle Mick wint out in the pours o' rain for the docthor, and if he done as I bid him there wouldn't have been a docthor in it at all, at all. Shure I tould him when you first tuk sick that hot whiskey punch was all the docthorin' you wanted. "Tin year ago," sez I, "I had Judy and the rest of the childre sick wid that same complaint, and divil a docthor put fut on my flure from first to last," sez I. "Thank God, I nivir wanted for whiskey," sez I, "and I gave the craythurs punch night and day," sez I, "and they were all over illigant red spots in no time," sez I. "Maybe so, Biddy," sez he, "but what would shoot childre like Judy mightn't agree wid a gintleman's daughter," sez he. And that was the first time I ever heard you wor a gintleman's daughter. Tell me now, Missy Plunkett, what soart of a gintleman was he to lave you behowlden to a huckster man's charity?'

'Don't ask rude questions,' I said crossly, 'but go on about Uncle Mick.'

'Maybe I will if you keep a civil tongue in your head,' said Biddy, with her mouth at the jug. 'That's illigant chicken tay, so it is. Well, shure we thought it was all over wid you that night in

airnest, and I whispers to Judy to put down the big kettle and have the hot wather handy to wash you the minnit the breath left your body.'

'You nasty old thing,' I muttered disgustedly.

'Nasty is it?' queried Biddy indignantly; 'and that's all the thanks I get for all the trouble I tuk to make a clane purty corpse ov you. Is it cryin' you are agin? Musha, thin, it's ashamed of yourself you ought to be, and me doin' all I can to keep up your sperits. Whisht now, till I tell you how the poor uncle got sick. Nothin' would do him that onlucky night but he must run out in the cowld and wet for the docthor. "Can't you run the boy out, Misther Murphy," sez I. "The boy is in bed," sez he, "and I'll go quicker myself." "The docthor is in bed too," sez I, "or else I'll engage it's divartin' himself at Captain Cassidy's he is. The Captain has a grand party to-night," sez I, "and there's a power o' quality at it," sez I, "and small blame to them to go where there's the best ov aitin' and dhrinkin'," sez I. "If the docthor is in bed," sez he, "he'll have to get up," sez he, "and if he's at Captain Cassidy's party he'll have to lave the aitin' and dhrinkin'," sez he. "The docthor bid me go for him if the child tuk a turn for the worse," sez he, "and I'm thinkin' he'll come wid me," sez he. "Captain Cassidy's place is three mile from here," sez I, "and you'll get ne'er a car to carry you there to-night," sez I. "The young gintlemin at the bank and the officers at the barracks has all the cars in the town out at Captain Cassidy's," sez I, "and if you take the short cut by Finnigan's farm, it's wadin' up to your knees in rain wather you'll be," sez I. "I'd wade up

to my neck from one ind ov Ireland to the other if that same would do the child e'er a bit o' good," sez he. So off he goes wid himself to the docthor, who was at Captain Cassidy's, shure enough, but he left all the sport the minnit he knew who was axin' for him, and he dhrove the Uncle Mick back wid him on his car. The docthor was as dhry as bone when he tuk off his raincoat, and it did my heart good to see the illigant red nose of him, but the poor Uncle Mick was like a dhrownded rat wid the rain soakin' into his skin, and not a dhrop o' whiskey in the house to dhry the damp out of his bones. He had the cowl'd on him next day, and sarve him right, the mane craythur. Not a tailor or a brogue-maker has been one pinny the bettther for him this last three year. The cowl'd was bad enough, but he nivir minded himself at all, at all, and was up night and day wid you till the docthor towld him there was no fear of you, and bid him go to bed. After that he said maybe he would lie down for a bit, and it's lyin' down he's been ever since from that time to this. Och, it's a poor case to have the pair o' yiz sick, so it is, and no one to do a hand's turn but poor Judy and me, and it takes me all my time to mind you, so it does.'

'Who minds Uncle Mick?' I asked.

'The boy is wid him at night, and Judy gives him a dhrink in the day,' said Biddy, again applying her mouth to the chicken tea.

'Come and help me to dress,' I said, sitting up in bed. 'I must go this minute and take care of Uncle Mick.'

'It's quare in your head you are agin,' said

Biddy, pressing down my weak body with a strong hand. 'Be aisy now, will you? I hear a fut on the stairs; maybe it's the docthor. Bedad, he let himself aisy into the house, so he did.'

In another moment the red-nosed, kind-eyed doctor was in the room.

'Oh, doctor,' I whimpered, 'please let me go to my poor Uncle Mick.'

The doctor's yellow face toned up to the colour of his nose as he turned angrily on Biddy.

'Is this the way you obey my orders?'

'Ah, docthor dear,' protested Biddy, 'I couldn't help it. Shure she had me persecuted till she got the thruth out o' me.'

'Poor little persecutor,' said the doctor, looking at me with such kind eyes that I caught his hand.

'Dear doctor,' I entreated, 'do let me get up and mind my dear Uncle Mick.'

The kind eyes looked watery, and the doctor, hastily releasing his hand, took out his pocket-handkerchief with a murmured remark about 'Nosey weather,' and turned his back on me to look out of the window.

'Good Christians going to worship,' he said. 'I hope they'll pray for absent sinners in general and doctors in particular. Now, my dear,' suddenly turning his face towards me, 'do you want to be kind or unkind to your uncle?'

'Kind, of course,' I said in an injured tone.

'That's right. Now, the kindest thing you can do for him is to stay where you are patiently and quietly till you are fit to get up. My dear, your uncle has done a great deal for your sake, and I am

sure you will be a sensible little woman for his sake.'

I was flattered by the doctor's belief in my sensible womanly possibilities, and hastened to assure him that his confidence was not groundless.

'Doctor, I will do all you tell me so that I may get quickly well enough to mind my Uncle Mick.'

'You are a very clear-headed young person,' said the doctor, taking a white flower from his button-hole. 'Allow me to offer you a small tribute of sincere admiration. Not the last rose of summer, but the last aster of autumn. It was blooming alone in my—I mean Dr. Foley's garden, and I appropriated it, as Helen thought unfairly, though I reminded her that she had adorned her own person with all the lovely companions not faded and gone before our advent.'

Long after the doctor had left me I lay gazing on the white aster with all the joy of a child who loves flowers and seldom sees them. Then for the first time in the first ten years of my life I made what seemed to me a great sacrifice, though it was small indeed compared to what had been sacrificed through those years to me and mine.

'Biddy,' I said, 'take this flower to my Uncle Mick, and tell him to keep it till I go to him, and that I will be with him very soon.'

I thought Biddy stayed a long time out of the room, but perhaps that was because I was so impatient to hear what Mick said about the flower.

'Faith, it wasn't much he had to say,' replied Biddy to my eager question. 'How could the poor man discourse about flowers and him so hard set to to dhraw a breath?'

'But didn't he like the flower?' I asked, feeling positive that Biddy could give me assurance of Mick's gratitude if she would only speak the truth.

'Ay,' said Biddy, 'he liked it well, and when I towld him you said you would soon be wid him, "Oh no," sez he, "not soon, plaze God," sez he.'

'Why did he not want me to go to him soon?' I asked in disappointed wonder.

'How do I know what makes all the sick people go on wid quare talk?' said Biddy.

'Did you put the flower in water?' I asked.

'No, I did not,' answered Biddy. 'I put it where he bid me, on his breast, and left it there goin' up and down like a ship in a storm at say.'

As I lay with closed eyes thinking of the white flower tossed about on Mick's heaving breast, I remembered the story of the little ship that was sinking into the stormy sea when One rose and commanded the waves to be still.

Then drowsy thought crossed the border of dreamland, and I saw a little ship with one white sail tossing about on a dark, rough sea.

I could not see any one on board, but I seemed to know that Mick was there alone. Every moment the sea became rougher and darker, till one great wave broke over the little ship, and I saw the white sail no more. Then all the waves of the sea rose like black mountains to meet the dark clouds, and I was filled with the horrible dread that Mick was perishing, with no one near to save him, when I heard a voice saying, 'Peace, be still.'

Then the high waves fell, and the great sea became a small river flowing between me and Mick, who was

smiling at me, with a white flower in his hand. I stretched out my hands to him, crying joyfully—

‘I am coming to you this minute; I can easily cross.’

But he shook his head, saying, as he waved the white flower towards me, ‘Not so soon, dear, not so soon.’

And, with his dear voice sounding in my ears, I awoke.

Biddy was standing by my bedside with a bowl of something drinkable, which, after tasting, I found detestable; and, in reply to my inquiry about Mick, I was informed that if I asked no questions I would be told no lies. Biddy went on to say that it was only ten minutes ago since the doctor had murdered her for satisfying my curiosity that morning, and had threatened to take her life again if she gave me any more information.

‘Was the doctor here again?’ I asked.

‘He was,’ said Biddy, ‘and what’s more, the priest was here.’

The significance of the priest’s visit did not strike me. As it was Sunday evening it seemed quite natural that Father Phelan should pay a visit to a faithful and favourite parishioner too ill to attend Mass in the morning.

Indeed, the priest’s visit suggested comforting rather than alarming thoughts, for I remembered how in the olden time the sick people touched by the Great Healer had gone in joy and gladness to show themselves to the priests.

Neither was there any anxiety in my mind the next morning when I asked, ‘How is my Uncle Mick?’

‘Ax the docthor whin he comes to see you,’ said Biddy; ‘he’ll be betther able to tell you nor me.’

'I'll ask him to let me get up,' I said ; 'I feel so much better to-day, Biddy.'

'Oh, there's no fear ov *you*,' said Biddy ; 'if every one else was as well, none of us need fret. Hurry now, and take your tay till I get a cup myself. Och, it's well to be you that's after sleepin' your seven senses away the whole blessed night, and me nivir closin' an eye.'

'I don't want any more of this,' I said after tasting the mixture of smoke and water she had brought me in a teacup. 'Pull the blind up, Biddy ; I want more light.'

'Then you may want it,' said Biddy. 'Shure that's as little as you can do for the poor Uncle Mick, who done so much for *you*.'

'What good can it do him to have the blind pulled down in this room when he is not in it ?' I asked, with the contempt always inspired by Biddy's notions.

She did not answer my question, having at the time of asking her ear open to a more attractive voice than mine.

'Mother,' I heard Judy whisper through the half-open door, 'you're wanted a minute in the kitchen. There's a few friends below, and Mrs. Flanagan has a pint o' whiskey wid her. Hurry down now, and get a taste in your tay. Och, it's a poor case to be in a house wid nobody in it to get up a dacint wake.'

Biddy was quickly outside the door, which she shut behind her as the word 'wake' struck on my ear with its terribly clear meaning. I knew that when there was a wake in a house somebody in that house must be dead. Who was dead in this house ? Oh ! who was dead ?

I could not ask Bidly, who had so promptly obeyed the call to whiskey in the kitchen. I would not have asked her if I could. I did not need to ask anybody who was dead.

Two in the house had been sick. I was one of the two, and I was alive.

I was alive enough to get out of bed and walk without any sense of pain or weakness down the stairs to Mick's room.

It was a small, mean room half-way between my own superior apartments and the kitchen where Bidly was tasting Mrs. Flanagan's whiskey. I could hear Bidly making merry with her friends, but she could not hear me, as I made my barefooted way to the room where Michael Murphy was alone with a white flower on his breast.

The white flower was no longer tossing like a ship on a stormy sea, for the breast on which it lay was peacefully still in the great calm of death.

Three years before, when my father fell dead on the deck of the *Conqueror*, I lifted up my voice and wept. But there is sometimes a world of difference between seven and ten, and now I stood silent and tearless beside the man who had been more than a father to me.

On the whitewashed wall at the foot of his bed hung a wooden crucifix that had day by day told the story of love and sacrifice to the simple soul following with humble steps in the way of the Cross.

The story of Calvary had been familiar for most of my ten years, but the first shadow of its true meaning fell on my heart as I looked on the dead face of the man who had given his life for me.

PART II

CHAPTER I

SAD SEVENTEEN

I HAD lost Mick for seven years—seven years that seemed seventy times seven to me as I looked back at them from the seventeenth birthday that found me still mourning him.

It may be said that a child of ten is incapable of the deep feeling from which such lasting sorrow springs. I can only answer that I do not think the heart that cannot feel deeply at ten is likely to feel deeply at twenty, or to find itself in any great depth at forty. But I give this opinion for what it is worth, which is neither more nor less than the value of any other opinion founded on personal experience of an exceptional kind. I do not think that under any circumstances I would ever have ceased to remember Mick with loving regret, though I admit the possibility of a more complete recovery from the heart-sickness that fell on me at ten if I had been surrounded by the healing influences of love. But all I then had of earthly love was buried out of my sight in Mick's dead heart.

It was long since I had made any outward show of grief that would have seemed foolish in the

sensible eyes of Miss Thorn. If Miss Thorn, who was making a tour of Dublin shops and markets on this first morning of the Christmas holidays, could have guessed that I had shut myself up to mourn for the man dead for seven years, she would probably have thought me as senseless as if I wept because the black frock I had brought to Thornville at ten would not fit me at seventeen.

Miss Thorn was my schoolmistress, and Thornville was at that time the most flourishing boarding school in the most popular Dublin suburb.

Michael Murphy had left a will authorising Mr. Barry, the organist, in whose integrity he rightly trusted, to sell his business and household effects, draw his small savings out of the Bank, and spend all that remained after the settlement of just claims in giving me what was called in the simply-worded but clearly-expressed will, 'the education of a lady.'

The hucksters of Castlerock regarded me as a great heiress when they heard that I had inherited three hundred pounds, which magnificent sum they all agreed was enough to educate the best lady in the land, and to make the fortune of any schoolmistress.

But Mr. Barry, who knew something about schools and schoolmistresses, and conscientiously wished to do what was best for me, was quite proud of the bargain he had made with Miss Thorn, who had educated his daughter Dora.

Miss Thorn was at that time anxious to clear off a mortgage on Thornville, and she agreed, in return for my three hundred pounds, paid in advance, to board, clothe, and educate me for seven years.

Miss Thorn was not a female Squeers. She was a conscientious woman, never grasping at unfair profits, and content in my case with what the average schoolmistress would call no profit at all.

She fed me with wholesome if not dainty food, clothed me neatly if not smartly, and gave me what in those pre-Girton days was considered a lady's education.

Miss Thorn honestly earned my three hundred pounds, and as there was nothing about love in the bargain with Mr. Barry, I could not blame her for not loving me.

Love was an extra, like the beef-tea and calf's-foot jelly, for which the parents of delicate pupils made special arrangements.

Miss Thorn was not bound to love me, but as in times of sickness she nourished me with beef-tea and jelly, for which she had no hope of recompense, so she might have given me the love for which no bargain had been made if I had at first sight appeared a lovable child.

But when I made my appearance at Thornville there was nothing attractive in my looks and manners.

My once-admired curls had been cut off in my illness, and for long afterwards my hair was thin and straight. The roses that had once made my Christian name suitable had faded from my cheeks. The bright eyes so often praised in Castlerock society were dimmed by much crying through the wretched weeks that followed Mick's death.

Biddy and Judy were my constant companions during the long weeks of my convalescence, and

they sympathised with my sorrow in their own aggravating way. At one time they encouraged me to cry, because I had been 'the death ov the poor Uncle Mick.' At another time they told me 'it was laughing any young girl ought to be that had come in for the ould man's fortune.'

At first I did battle with my tormentors, but as they generally came off victorious in the war of words, and always enjoyed the fight, I changed my line of defence, and took refuge in a sulky silence that left its forbidding stamp on my countenance long after Biddy and Judy had ceased from troubling my daily life.

'Miss Plunkett is not pretty.'

So said a young governess who took away the candle from the room where I had been sent early to bed on the night of my arrival at Thornville, and was supposed to be asleep.

'I call her beastly ugly,' said the girl in the next bed to mine.

'Beastly is a vulgar word,' said the young governess reprovingly, 'and it is un-Christian to call any human being ugly. You would express yourself quite as clearly, and more charitably, if you said Miss Plunkett was positively plain.'

Once 'Little Missy Plunkett' had been set up as a beauty, but that was when Mick was alive.

Now Mick was dead, and the positively plain Miss Plunkett who cried herself to sleep that night was none the prettier for her tears next morning.

'Miss Plunkett is very backward for her age,' said the same young governess in answer to Miss

Thorn's inquiries after morning lessons, 'and her pronunciation is very bad.'

I thought of the place where I had been considered a 'knowledgeable child' with 'a beautiful accent'—the place where I had lived with Mick, who was now dead.

'Rosamund,' said Miss Thorn in the calm voice long accustomed to control the rising storm of youthful emotion, 'you must not cry like a baby when your deficiencies are pointed out, but resolve like a sensible girl to improve. Now it is recreation time, and a lively game will do you good. Lucy Lance,' addressing a little girl lingering behind the others, 'take Rosamund Plunkett in charge this morning and help her to make friends.'

'Yes, Miss Thorn,' said Lucy meekly.

Lucy was a short, fat girl of twelve, with such a soft little baby face, and such a sweet little childish voice, that no one could have supposed she was in her own way as great a power at Thornville as the tall, stately schoolmistress who appeared to reign supreme.

Miss Thorn, who according to an ancient school tradition had once nearly been a clergyman's wife, was always ready to meet any reasonable views of clerical parents about reduction of terms, and most of the boarders at Thornville came from provincial parsonages.

These young gentlewomen of various ages and characters, and often widely different opinions, all met on the common ground of belief that a clergyman's daughter, rich or poor, pretty or plain, clever or stupid, was born to sit down in Society's Judg-

ment-seat and set bounds that certain secular classes might not pass. No one, from the eldest to the youngest, held so firmly to the Divine Rights of clergymen's daughters as little soft-faced, sweet-voiced Lucy Lance, daughter of a Church of Ireland rector, and niece of a Church of England bishop.

'A bishop ranks with an earl,' Lucy used to say for the further enlightenment of the professional classes whom she patronised, and the total extinction of the commercial classes, whom she snubbed.

'But, Lucy,' said a builder's daughter one day, struggling against the extinguisher, 'my uncle is Lord Mayor of Dublin, and isn't a Lord Mayor as grand as a bishop or an earl?'

'Oh, much grander than an archbishop or a duke,' said Lucy, with a soft sarcasm that was lost on the Lord Mayor's niece, who never could see why her perfectly serious question became a standing joke.

On this my first morning at Thornville I knew nothing of the ordeal towards which Lucy Lance was leading me, and in my ignorance I felt something like comfort in the touch of her soft little hand.

It was too damp this winter morning for exercise in the garden, but the recreation room was large enough for the younger girls to amuse themselves at a respectful distance from the elder ones, who were gathering round the fire for confidential converse.

As Lucy led me past the seniors, towards the assembly of her own familiars, my heavy heart began to lighten with the pleasant prospect of congenial companionship.

I did not fail to perceive the superiority of these new school-fellows to the hucksters' daughters of Castlerock, but as I was not then convinced of my own inferiority, I was not depressed by any doubt of speedy popularity.

'Girls,' said Lucy in her sweet little voice, still holding me with her soft little hand, 'Miss Thorn says I am to help Rosamund Plunkett to make friends, but I can't help every new girl to make friends. Can I, Dora?'

The girl she named was a barrister's granddaughter, who often stood up for equal rights with clergymen's daughters, and sometimes had the audacity to set up barrister's wigs against bishop's aprons, but who never failed to join forces with the bishop's niece against all meaner pretensions.

'No, Lucy,' said Dora, in a voice as hard as Lucy's was soft, 'no one but a gentleman's daughter can make friends with us.'

Still holding Lucy's soft white hand, I looked up fearlessly into Dora's hard brown eyes.

'I am a gentleman's daughter,' I said.

'Every new girl says her father is a gentleman,' said Dora; 'but we like to know what a new girl calls a gentleman. Don't we, Lucy?'

'Yes, Dora,' said Lucy, 'we like to know.'

They both looked at me, and the other little girls who had not spoken looked too, while I, not knowing what was expected of me, could only look at them all.

Then Lucy lifted her soft voice.

'What is your papa?'

'Papa is dead,' I answered, 'and mamma too,' I

added, with a generous wish to give them more than the required information.

There were a few faintly-murmured 'Ohs' in the little crowd, where there were some black frocks.

'It is very sad to be an orphan,' murmured the soft-voiced Lucy. 'There are several orphans here. May Desmond has no papa, and Nora Penrose has no mamma, and poor little Dottie Maunsell's papa and mamma are both dead. May's papa was a clergyman. So is Nora's. Dottie's papa was a doctor, but her grandpapa is a clergyman. What was your papa, Rosamund?'

'I don't know,' I said, hesitating for a moment, and then suddenly illuminated by a flash of Australian memory—'Oh yes, I remember. My papa was a digger.'

Lucy dropped my hand.

There was another loud murmur of 'Oh' in the little crowd.

'Do you mean a gravedigger?' asked Dora Curtis.

'Oh no,' I answered, 'a gold-digger.'

Dora and Lucy looked at each other in evident perplexity.

'I don't know anything about gold-diggers,' said the bishop's niece; 'do you, Dora?'

'No, Lucy,' said the barrister's granddaughter; 'but I am sure a gold-digger can't be a gentleman.'

'That would depend on how much gold he dug,' said the builder's daughter.

'Not at all,' said a curate's ten-year-old daughter, who was prematurely aged by home troubles. 'There is a man in our parish who made a fortune at the

gold-diggings—a very large fortune, papa says, and he comes to church in a carriage and pair, and puts a sovereign in the plate every Sunday, and a five-pound note on charity sermon Sundays, but he is quite a common man, and all his friends are common people. His wife wanted to take mamma out driving when she had been ill, and poor mamma longed for a drive in the beautiful carriage, and we were all so sorry she could not have it, but of course mamma could not go out driving with any one who wasn't a lady.'

'Of course not,' said the little crowd in one breath.

Dora Curtis fixed her hard brown eyes steadily on my confused face.

'Now, Rosamund Plunkett,' she said, 'what right have you to call yourself a gentleman's daughter?'

'Uncle Mick said I was a gentleman's daughter,' I stammered. 'Uncle Mick is dead too.' And I drew nearer to Lucy, with a great longing for the comfortable touch of her soft little hand. But neither then nor at any other time did Lucy Lance touch the burden of my sorrow with one of her fat little fingers.

'Don't come so close to me, please,' said the sweet little voice. 'Was your Uncle Mick a digger too?'

'He was a digger in Australia,' I answered, with an honest desire to give all the information that in my ignorance I saw no reason for withholding, 'but when we came to Ireland he kept a shop.'

'Do you hear that, Dora?' asked the bishop's niece.

'Yes, Lucy,' said the barrister's granddaughter, 'I hear.'

'What kind of things did he sell?' asked the builder's daughter.

'Bacon,' I answered, 'and butter, and soap, and eggs, and herrings, and lots of things I don't remember just now. It was called a huckster's shop.'

There was a third, and this time a very loud, murmur of 'Oh' in the little crowd.

Then Lucy Lance spoke in her softest voice.

'I am very sorry for you, Rosamund, but I cannot help you to make friends. None of my friends can make friends with you. Can they, Dora?'

'No, Lucy,' said Dora, 'we can't make friends with a digger's daughter.'

'Nor a huckster's niece,' said the builder's daughter, eagerly embracing her first opportunity of sitting in social judgment.

Then the nice-looking children to whom my lonely heart had gone out at first sight started a game of 'oranges and lemons,' in which I was not invited to join.

It was a game as popular in the streets and lanes of Castlerock as in this refined Dublin suburb, and I thought of the absent and now very dear hucksters' daughters with whom I had played it so often and so merrily. Then I thought of the still more delightful play in which only two players played. I, Queen Victoria on her throne, and Mick, who was in himself a host of loyal subjects. Now Mick was dead, and I was no longer a queen, but a sad little school-girl standing apart from an unfriendly crowd.

'Girls are cruel.' So said a writer in the *Satur-*

day Review, and never were truer words written on journalistic page. Boys are cruel, too. They have a way of using feet and fists that must be decidedly unpleasant to the weaker brethren. Yet I verily believe the kicks and cuffs of brutal boys to be more tolerable than the snubs and sneers of gentle girls. Those who have only seen the sunny side of school life will laugh this belief to scorn. Laugh on, happy sceptics! I look not to you for sympathy, but to those who have walked among the shadows of a school-girl's Coventry.

We have never had any assurance that the souls in bliss are mindful of their human friends, but we know that one soul in torment took thought for earthly brethren.

Perhaps it was because I found Thornville more of a purgatory than a paradise that my heart was aching on my seventeenth birthday for the love I had lost before my tenth. I did not often cry now, and never unless I was quite alone. I was quite alone on this holiday morning, sitting on my little white bed, surrounded by other little white beds that would be empty while happy homes were full. I had early taken to heart Miss Thorn's wish that I should be a sensible girl, and long practice had made me almost perfect in the exercise of control over all foolish emotions. Almost, but not altogether. It is hard to be entirely sensible at seventeen, and I cried like a baby over all that remained to me of Mick, the letter he had written to me when I was only seven.

I cried heartily, but not long. The dinner hour was drawing near, and Miss Thorn must see no

trace of the tears that were my only birthday treat.

I kissed the dear signature, and hid the letter in the place where for seven years I had kept it carefully from the sight of scornful young eyes that would have seen nothing but its defects of grammar and spelling.

Then from another place in my shabby little desk I took another letter, written in a gentlemanly hand on crested paper.

When Mick was dying he requested Mr. Barry to write to my uncle, Henry Plunkett, informing him of my position, and commending me to his consideration.

When Mick lay dead the answer came.

CASTLE PLUNKETT, CO. CORK,
30th November 18—.

MY DEAR SIR—In answer to your communication about the girl Rosamund, I regret to say it is out of my power to do anything for her at present. My mother, who is now a confirmed invalid and resides with me, was so unfavourably impressed by the child in question three years ago that she declines once for all to contribute to her support. Indeed, the subject agitates her so painfully that I cannot, with due consideration for her age and state of health, think of mentioning it in her presence again. As for myself, the claims of my own large family do not justify me in making any further provision than that already made by the man Michael Murphy. Considering that my unfortunate brother lost his position in society before this child was born, the provision you tell me Murphy has made ought to be sufficient for her maintenance till she is old enough to earn her own living. The only suggestion I offer is, that the girl Rosamund should be sent back to Australia when her schooling is done. There she would probably find her mother's relations willing to protect her, and no doubt she

would earn more money by governessing than in the overstocked market of this country. When the proper time comes I will not object to pay her second-class passage. Till then I need not trouble you to make any further communication on the subject.—I am, my dear sir, your obedient servant,
HENRY ST. GEORGE PLUNKETT.

It was always well for me to read this letter after my dear Mick's.

The tears shed for the man so lovingly proud of being an uncle to me were dried in the fire of resentment that kindled in my eyes as they read the words of the uncle to whom I was only 'the girl Rosamund.'

'I would rather work my passage out to Australia than go second class at his expense,' I muttered indignantly as I applied a cold sponge to my hot eyes. 'I would rather go as a man before the mast.'

Then regarding my rather small hands, and taking into account the rope-pulling expected of an able-bodied seaman, I was moved to laugh at the folly of a generally sensible girl in a way that did more than the cold sponge for the restoration of my tear-stained face.

'Girl Rosamund,' I said, 'you can't be a chooser more than any other beggar, and as you wish of all things to go to your mother's relations, you must accept a second-class passage with becoming humility from your father's brother.'

The dinner bell rang, and I went downstairs with a clear, calm face, and hair arranged in the neatly unbecoming style approved by Miss Thorn, to whom the fringe then struggling into fashion was an abomination.

CHAPTER II

MY ADVERTISEMENT

I MET Miss Thorn coming out of her invalid sister's room. A tall, fair woman, with well-cut features too large to have been pretty in girlhood, but handsome in late womanhood, and a grandly proportioned figure. Miss Thorn was not given to personal extravagance, and it was because she considered the best materials the cheapest, and the best make the most lasting, that she was always handsomely dressed. On this occasion she wore a plain, perfectly-fitting black satin gown, with the long-trained skirt of that now far-distant day, and an arrangement of black lace and lavender ribbon on her head that was very becoming to her fair and still unwrinkled face. Altogether a woman whom nature evidently intended to be the joyful mother of children, a mother who would have been the joy of daughters and the pride of sons. But twenty-five years ago Miss Thorn had chosen what women in general do not think the better part. Miss Thorn herself would have denied her own right of choice in the matter.

'When there is only one thing to be done, there is no choosing between two things,' she would have

said in the calm voice that never willingly uttered an exaggerated sentiment. 'If I had married I could not have kept school, if I had not kept school I could not have kept Amabel, and it was my duty to keep Amabel.'

Amabel was the invalid sister, who for more than a quarter of a century had suffered from some mysterious complaint that obliged her to recline on the softest of couches whenever she was not taking the air in the easiest of basket carriages, but did not rob her of an appetite for delicacies in general, and those out of season in particular.

Miss Amabel was often called 'Miss Thorn's angel sister' by admiring friends, and she did her best to sustain the angelic character. She wore white raiment whenever the weather permitted, and golden curls all the year round. If subject to the mortal condition of growing older as the years went on, it was not generally known. Miss Amabel closely veiled her angelic face when she went abroad, and sheltered it behind becomingly tinted window blinds and lamp shades when she stayed at home.

Miss Amabel was also regarded by the same admiring friends as a poetic genius. She had written, and, at her sister's expense, published a volume of verses about crosses and crowns, fierce floods and fiery furnaces, chastening rods and sub-missive kisses.

Miss Thorn and I sat down alone to dinner that day—a new experience for me, as in all previous holidays a French governess and one or more West Indian pupils had remained at Thornville. But the last French governess had been found unsatisfactory

and dismissed at the end of the quarter, and the youngest of a large family of West Indians had returned to her native isle.

It was pleasant to sit down to the small, neatly-appointed table in Miss Thorn's own sitting-room, and pleasanter still to contemplate the daintily-cooked sole that was placed before Miss Thorn.

'I meant this for Miss Amabel,' explained Miss Thorn, 'but she has taken a sudden dislike to sole. I am sorry, as it is scarce and dear, and I was obliged to go out of my way for it this morning. However, Rosamund, it will be a little treat for you and me.'

'Please, ma'am,' said Mary, the parlour-maid, just in time to save the delicate morsel from division, 'Miss Amabel bid me say a minute ago that she has changed her mind about the sole, and will trouble you to send it to her. She says, ma'am, that she forgot how good white fish was for the brain.'

'Very well, Mary,' said Miss Thorn, putting the dish on the tray in Mary's hand. 'Tell Bridget to bring up the next course.'

Bridget duly appeared with a dreary-looking remnant of cold mutton.

'This is not what I ordered for to-day's dinner,' said Miss Thorn, with calm displeasure. 'Why has cook not made the beefsteak pie?'

'Please, ma'am,' said Bridget, 'cook bid me tell you that when you were out in the morning Miss Amabel was reading about some grand new way of making beef-tea with the best steak, and she bid cook begin and do it. She wanted it very strong,

ma'am, and enough of it to put her through the day and night ; so it took all the steak in the house, and cook didn't like to order more without your leave, ma'am, and Miss Amabel said you would as soon have the cold mutton.'

Miss Thorn's fair face slightly shaded. Did it occur to her then, or at any other time, that her angel sister was what human beings call 'greedy'?

'Ask cook if she can make a couple of pancakes,' she said as she began to cut the mutton.

'Please, ma'am,' said Bridget on her return from the kitchen, 'cook says there's ne'er an egg in the house but the two new-laid ones that Miss Amabel says is to be kept for her supper custard.'

Miss Thorn finished her portion of mutton in silence, and then bringing forth from a cabinet the silver basket sacred to visitors, she cut me a large slice of plum cake, evidently as partial compensation for dainty fish and savoury pie. I was young enough to take intense pleasure in plum cake, and old enough to appreciate the kind consideration of the woman who did not eat thereof.

When the dinner table was cleared she sat down in an easy-chair with the quiet satisfaction of one rejoicing in the prospect of rest after a tiresome day.

'Please, ma'am,' said Mary, again appearing, 'Miss Amabel wants you to come and write down the poetry in her head. She has eat the whole of the fish, ma'am, and she said it gave her a power o' brain.'

'I suppose Miss Amabel really said "brain-power," Mary,' said Miss Thorn, smiling a little wearily, but rising at once from her chair.

‘Miss Thorn,’ I said, ‘may I not write down Miss Amabel’s verses while you rest?’

‘No, thank you, Rosamund,’ said Miss Thorn. ‘Miss Amabel likes to dictate her verses to me, and I am accustomed to help her in correcting and arranging metre.’

Then I was left alone with a new and strange idea—the idea that this wise and cultured gentlewoman was animated by the same spirit of sacrifice that had made the life of my unlearned and ignorant Mick sublime.

It was as a silent tribute to that blessed spirit that I did the little in my power that winter evening for the comfort of my schoolmistress, now presented to my mind as one in her own way as lonely and as unloved as myself.

When she returned to the room I had made the fire very bright, lit her reading-lamp, wound her knitting wool, and cut the leaves of a Christmas magazine.

‘You are a kind, thoughtful girl,’ she said. ‘Thank you, my dear.’

The ordinary schoolmistress calls her pupils dear as often as the ordinary clergyman calls his congregation beloved, but Miss Thorn was not an ordinary schoolmistress, and no merely conventional phrase ever passed her strictly truthful lips. When, therefore, she called me dear I felt that my small attentions had for the moment endeared me to her, and my heart was glad. Miss Thorn neither read nor worked for a few minutes, but sat with her large shapely white hands resting on her black satin lap, while I absorbed myself in a crochet pattern, popular

in the dark ages when no sweetness and light entered the soul of woman through needlework of South Kensington design.

'Rosamund,' said Miss Thorn, at last taking her knitting in hand, 'you have now been nearly seven years with me. You have come to the end of your school course, though I hope you are too wise to consider your education finished. You have no remarkable talent, but you are intelligent and fairly well informed, and I can safely recommend you as a governess to young children. I know of more than one family where you would be received, but if you would rather begin the teacher's life here, I will arrange a class of juniors for you next quarter.'

I knew that this offer was made with the real kindness that had influenced all Miss Thorn's dealings with me, but now that a continuance of Thornville life was offered to me I realised the intensity of my wish to end it, and even at the hateful risk of appearing ungrateful I spoke the truth.

'Thank you, Miss Thorn,' I said with a beating heart, 'but I would rather not stay at Thornville.'

Miss Thorn's fair face flushed with evidently unpleasant surprise.

'Have you not been happy here?' she asked.

It was hard to tell the woman who had always been just, and often generous to me, that I had not been happy under her roof, but hard as it was, I told her.

I rose and stood before her, as I had often stood through the years that were gone with a difficult lesson imperfectly learned, but bound to be said somehow.

‘Miss Thorn, you have always been good to me, but I have not been happy here—sometimes I have been very miserable.’

And when the first barrier of reserve between a stately schoolmistress and a shy pupil was broken down, I told the true history of those seven years through which the digger’s daughter and huckster’s niece had been despised and rejected of girls.

Miss Thorn heard me in silence to the end, and then for a few moments regarded me with an expression in her troubled face that I scarcely understood then, but whose meaning is clear in the light of later insight.

Time, the great thought-reader, can alone perfect us in the interpretation of language written on brows that were old when we ourselves were young.

This is what I now see written in the lines that crossed Miss Thorn’s generally smooth forehead on the night of my seventeenth birthday—

‘I have done what I thought was my whole duty by this girl for seven years ; I have provided wholesome nourishment for her body ; I have carefully cultured her mind ; I have sheltered her soul in the fold of strictest orthodoxy, and lo ! at the end of the seven years I hear her tell me that the heart, for which I took no thought, was all the time starved, and sick, and sore.’

When I ceased from speaking I sat down, and when Miss Thorn spoke her brow was clear again.

In her well-balanced mind sense was sure to triumph over sentiment.

‘Rosamund, if you had told me all this at first, you might have spared yourself much unnecessary

suffering. Believe me, there is no pain so profitless as needless martyrdom.'

I answered her with a freedom that surprised myself.

'Miss Thorn, I never thought of speaking to you in those early days unless you spoke to me. Indeed, I would no more have taken the liberty of bringing this trouble to you than the humblest guest of the Queen would dare to bring a private grievance under her Majesty's notice at a State dinner party. Besides, though you were a real sovereign in my eyes, I did not think that even you could make me anything in the eyes of the school but a digger's daughter and a huckster's niece.'

Miss Thorn slightly smiled as she answered—

'I could not have altered the facts of digging and huckstering, but I could have pointed out extenuating circumstances that would have had a favourable effect on public opinion. I could have explained that your father was superior by birth to the ordinary gold-digger, and that the good man who was so faithful to him, and so kind to you, was not really your uncle, but the son of a tenant farmer on your grandfather's estate. Mr. Barry gave me this information when he placed you with me, but it did not occur to me to enter into the question of your social position with little Lucy Lance, who brought her doll to school the first quarter, and who looked so much more childish at twelve than you looked at ten.'

'But was I really right in calling myself a gentleman's daughter?' I asked, painfully mindful of the inquisition of seven years ago.

‘Quite right,’ said Miss Thorn. ‘I am not personally acquainted with the Plunketts of Castle Plunkett, but I know they were gentlefolks for many generations before the Lances could boast of a bishop.’

‘And do you really consider me a lady?’ I asked eagerly.

‘I really do,’ she answered, smiling; ‘and though I am not in the habit of feeding youthful vanity, I think in your present state of morbid humility it will be rather good for you than otherwise to hear Lady Blake’s opinion of you.’

Lady Blake was an ancient dame of high degree and small income, whose youngest granddaughter had been educated at Thornville, and who was always present at breaking-up parties.

‘This is what Lady Blake said to me on Tuesday evening,’ continued Miss Thorn. “‘I admire many of your pupils. Some of them are remarkably handsome, and some of them are uncommonly clever, but Miss Plunkett has the gentlewomanly look that pleases me better than beauty or cleverness.’”

In my grateful joy I could have kissed the lips that had so graciously repeated such gracious words, but my sense of fitness checked any such demonstration of sudden affection for my undemonstrative schoolmistress.

So I sat in my place and simply said—

‘I may thank you, Miss Thorn, for making me a gentlewoman.’

‘Gentlewomen, like poets, are born, not made,’ said Miss Thorn. ‘I could not have manufactured the proverbial silk purse if you had not brought me

the right material, but you could not have shaped your silk into the pattern approved by society without the instruction of a professional pursemaker. I am glad I have been so far useful to you, but sorry I have till now known nothing of your life out of lesson-time. I have hitherto thought it unwise of a schoolmistress to darken recreation hours with her shadow, but I now see that my utter ignorance of a school-girl's life outside the schoolroom was a greater folly. I cannot alter your past, Rosamund, so I will not make vain lament, but I hope what you have told me will help me to wiser dealing with other young lives. And now, all things considered, I think a change of scene will be good for you. If you would like to go abroad with a clergyman's family for a year, I know of a very suitable situation. The salary would be small, but you would have the advantage of improving yourself in French and German.'

I did not feel in the least attracted towards clergymen's families, and I wanted to go farther than France or Germany.

'Miss Thorn,' I said, 'I want to go to Australia. My uncle, Henry Plunkett, said seven years ago that he would pay my second-class passage when I left school, and I want so much to go to Adelaide.'

'Why Adelaide?' asked Miss Thorn.

'Because,' I said, growing confused under the steady gaze of her calm, sensible eyes, 'I believe my mother's relations are there, and I think perhaps they will love me more than my father's relations have done.'

Miss Thorn smiled a little smile and sighed a little sigh.

'You think love is a necessity of life, Rosamund. It is a natural thought at your age, and I need not try to lecture you into the conviction that we were sent into this world not to be loved but to do our duty. Are you quite sure of finding your relations in Australia?'

I felt rather foolish as I admitted that I was by no means sure.

'It would be a pity to take such a long journey with anything less than a certainty in view,' said sensible Miss Thorn. 'Before you apply to Mr. Plunkett for your passage money it is advisable to make some inquiries. Your Australian relatives may have returned home during the last seven years, or there may be friends in England who can give you information about them. There is constant communication between Australia and Liverpool. Let us begin our inquiries at Liverpool. Please give me pen and paper.'

I did her bidding with secret admiration of her business-like promptitude, and gratitude for her kindly help.

'What relations have you in Adelaide?' she asked.

Again I felt foolish when I could only name one relation—my mother's father.

'Do you know his Christian name?' asked Miss Thorn.

Fortunately I was able to answer this question.

Mick had once told me that my Australian grandfather was commonly called 'Old Bat Smith,' and when I objected to Bat as an ugly name I was informed that it was an abbreviation of Bartholomew.

I vaguely remembered some of Mick's allusions to the said Old Bat's trouble with 'the boys,' but had now no way of knowing whether those boys were my grandfather's sons or his shop assistants.

'Do you remember your father and mother's Christian names?' asked Miss Thorn.

I had among my very few Australian relics a gilt-edged prayer-book in which was written—

To dear Amelia,
From her loving husband,
Arthur St. George Plunkett.

'Do you know the date of your father's death?' asked Miss Thorn.

'I don't know the exact date,' I answered, 'but it was ten years ago, and, Miss Thorn, he did not die a natural death—he was killed.'

'Yes, I know,' said Miss Thorn quietly, 'but we need not make our advertisement sensational.' And she began to write in her clear, firm hand.

Two days later the following advertisement appeared in the leading Liverpool papers:—

Rosamund Smith Plunkett, only child of Arthur St. George Plunkett, of Castle Plunkett, Co. Cork, who met his death on board the ship *Conqueror*, between Melbourne and Liverpool ten years ago, and of Amelia, his wife, daughter of Bartholomew Smith, of Adelaide, South Australia, will be much obliged to any one who can give her information about her mother's relations either in England or Australia. Please address, Thornville, Co. Dublin.

CHAPTER III

THE ANSWER

FOR seven years the postman's knock had been an unmeaning sound to me, but now I listened eagerly for it at morn and eventide. Through the last week of December, and for nearly a fortnight of the new year, that knock meant nothing but disappointment. At last, when I was beginning to despair of any light from Liverpool, a letter came to me.

The envelope bore the postmark of a Welsh town, and the contents were written in a clear, round hand on paper of the best quality.

BRYN HALL, LLANDHUL, NORTH WALES,
12th January 18—.

DEAR ROSAMUND SMITH PLUNKETT—Having observed your advertisement in the *Liverpool Courier*, which is one of the many Conservative organs to which I subscribe, I had a desire to communicate with you, but I first deemed it essential to assure myself that you were a young person whom it would be desirable for me to befriend. Though not of a great age, I am a man of old-fashioned ideas that often seem strait-laced in the eyes of the present careless generation, and before asking you to make your home with me I wished to make sure of your desirability as a per-

manent inmate of my house. In this matter I took counsel with the Reverend Thomas Lloyd Jones, the estimable vicar of this parish and my intimate friend, who, after inquiry among his clerical brethren, was able to put me in communication with the Reverend Robert Maguire, incumbent of the district in which Thornville is situated. I am happy to say that Mr. Maguire's answers to my inquiries are most satisfactory. He informs me that you have been educated by an estimable and accomplished lady who rents several pews in his church, and that you are a steady, sedate young person, whose conduct during his Saturday Scripture class at Thornville has always been exemplary. No doubt the privilege of so many years' association with the daughters of the clergy has had a beneficial effect on your character. I have a great respect for the Church of Ireland clergy, believing them to be more truly Protestant than our own, who, I grieve to say, too often shrink from the light of our glorious Reformation principles.

I have requested Mr. Maguire not to mention the subject of our correspondence before he receives information of this communication with you, but when the excellent Miss Thorn applies to him, he will be able to give her those particulars about my social standing and moral character with which my friend the Vicar of Llandhul has supplied him.

And now you will be naturally anxious to know who your present correspondent is. Well, my dear Rosamund, permit me to introduce myself as your mother's kinsman, and the only member of the Smith family likely to give you the assistance that, according to your clergyman's account of your present circumstances, will be acceptable to you. Your grandfather, Bartholomew Smith, died in Adelaide three years ago, and I have no reason to believe that any of his sons now scattered about the Colonies are in a position to help you or any one else. Of late years I have known very little about these Australian Smiths; but in the old time, before your grandfather emigrated, I was bound to them by ties of affectionate intimacy, and I may

have reasons of my own for wishing to befriend your mother's daughter. Even a middle-aged Manchester warehouseman may have his romantic weakness, and I confess that the more you are like your mother the more pleasure your appearance will give me. My dear Rosamund, I want you to come as a daughter to me, and a sister to my son Eugene, who is an attractive and accomplished young man, not many years beyond what Mr. Maguire tells me is your own age. I have long been a widower, with the firm intention of remaining one, and as it has pleased Providence to make me a rich man, you may rest assured of a comfortable provision for the future if I find you what I fondly hope you will be. I enclose a five-pound note, that may be useful to you. You need only pay your boat fare, as I intend to meet you at Holyhead and conduct you to the place in Wales which I purchased, at first as a seaside residence, but have now made my permanent home. Let me know by return of post the day and hour of your arrival at Holyhead. In order to assist your recognition of me, I may inform you that I am a tall man, with blue eyes, an aquiline nose, and a brown beard, slightly streaked with gray, and that as I always dress in black, I am often supposed to be a clergyman.

Present my compliments to the excellent Miss Thorn, and accept the affectionate regards of your friend and cousin,

PEPPER SMITH.

When I came to the end of this letter I was happier than I had been since Mick's death. Miss Thorn had considerably sent me upstairs to read it alone, and I laughed and danced in a way that was not altogether consistent with the character of 'a steady, sedate young person.'

Could it be true? Was I, the lonely and unloved Rosamund Smith Plunkett, going to a real home where a father and a brother were waiting to receive me?

Yes, it was true. The letter in my hand was as real as the little white beds around me—the little white beds that would be occupied by home-sick school-girls when I would be at the beginning of my endless holiday.

How beautiful to me were those pages, written in a hand like copper-plate, in the style of *The Polite Letter Writer*!

How charmingly pathetic was the suggestion of a hopeless attachment for my mother in the long-ago days when she and her kinsman, Pepper Smith, were young together!

I had not read many romances. Needless to say that nothing in the way of sensational novels found a place in the school library. Still, in certain religious and moral tales provided for the leisure hours of the elder girls there were passages of love-making between young men of exalted virtue and maidens of modest beauty. Neither was the element of despair wanting in these chaste love stories, though the despair was as decorous as the love was correct. If the author laid the scene of the unfortunate attachment in the upper regions of society, the hero was generally a curate of abnormal intellect and supernatural sanctity, scorned by the heartless parents of an unworldly but obedient heiress, and brought to an early grave by a consumptive cough. If the author condescended to write about middle-class mortals, there was usually an affecting scene in a honeysuckle porch between the ideal farmer's daughter and the simple yeoman, whose love she could not return.

I had eagerly devoured all these mild romances,

and been in love with curate and yeoman in turn.

I had mourned by the consumptive curate's early grave, and turned sorrowfully away with the simple yeoman from the honeysuckle porch.

It was probably in a honeysuckle porch that Pepper Smith had told the story of his hopeless love to his cousin Amelia, as they were both, I supposed, of the class that makes love in honeysuckle porches at a respectful distance from the stately mansions where curates court heiresses.

With the lively imagination of seventeen I continued this romance of real life.

Amelia had emigrated to Australia in consequence of family misfortune—probably a mortgage on the honeysuckle porch. I did not exactly know what a mortgage was, but I remembered that the misfortunes of virtuous families in the school library were generally caused by mortgages. Bartholomew, her venerable father—the father of the virtuous heroine of Thornville fiction was always venerable—I easily transformed from an ideal English farmer into a model Australian shopkeeper.

Far from the land of her birth Amelia was wooed and won by the impoverished son of an aristocratic Irish house—Arthur St. George Plunkett by name—and after various chances and changes of colonial life, died when her only child was five years old.

Meanwhile Pepper Smith, having wandered from the honeysuckle porch to the haunts of commerce, had, by strict attention to business and a marriage with his employer's daughter, gradually grown into a Manchester warehouseman.

And now the rich and generous Pepper Smith was stretching out a fatherly hand to the poor orphan of Amelia, whom he had loved so hopelessly when he was a simple yeoman.

It was all very beautiful, and the romance would have been perfect if I could have given the hero a more poetic Christian name than Pepper, and a more uncommon surname than Smith.

The five-pound note was a great joy to me. I had never handled five shillings during the seven years of my school life, as Miss Thorn, unlike Mr. Squeers, did not undertake to supply boarders with pocket-money.

Of course, I had no real need of it, but sensible girl though I tried to be, I was often fretted by the lack of it at Christmas and other times when the servants of a large household reap their silver harvest.

The Irishwoman in domestic service may be less mercenary than her Saxon sister, but she has not yet risen to the noble scorn of a tip that makes her American cousin sublime.

The servants at Thornville were too good-natured to willingly hurt my feelings, yet they often unconsciously cut me to the heart when they showed me a dress or a shawl to which I had not contributed, or savings-bank figures to which I had made no addition.

Now I had five pounds of my own; that is to say, what would remain out of five pounds when my travelling expenses to Holyhead were subtracted. I could buy a wedding present for Mary, who was going to be married before Lent. I could enable Bridget,

who was going to the wedding, to adorn herself according to her heart's desire. I could help cook to provide some extra comfort for the sickly grandson to whose support most of her wages were devoted. Best of all, I could present Miss Thorn with the pretty work-basket she had admired one day when we were in a fancy shop together.

Oh, how delightful,
Oh, how entrancing !

I sang with more soul in my mezzo-soprano voice than my singing master had ever been able to call forth in the teaching of Bishop's song. Then I performed part of the Lancers ; that is to say, I dropped the low curtsy ordered by the dancing-master in the third figure. The imaginary gentleman to whom I made this stately reverence was my uncle, Henry Plunkett.

'I thank you, sir,' I said, with my best imitation of eighteenth-century dignity, 'but I need not trouble you for a second-class passage now.'

Then the idea of a second-class passage brought me close to the memory of a steerage passage, and a steerage passenger with a pale pock-marked face. I no longer danced and sang. I fell on my knees by the bed where, seven years ago, I cried myself to sleep because Mick was dead, and no one loved me.

'Oh, Mick,' I whispered, 'dear Uncle Mick ! no one will ever love me as well as you did, and I will never love any one else so well.'

CHAPTER IV

‘UNCLE PEPPER’

MY kinsman Pepper Smith and I faced each other in the first-class carriage that we had all to ourselves for most of our Welsh journey.

I had easily recognised the tall clerical-looking figure advancing towards the boat with the step that is called dignified by a man's friends, and pompous by his foes. Before I was near enough to see the colour of the eyes, decide on the shape of the nose, or mark the different shades of the beard, the general appearance of the man struck me as gentlemanly.

In the after-time I heard it remarked that Pepper Smith was too gentlemanly to be a gentleman.

As I sat opposite to him in the railway carriage I came to the conclusion that he was really handsome for an old man. Pepper Smith must at that time have been some years under fifty, but in the eyes of seventeen there is no difference worth mentioning between forty and eighty.

I had an uncomfortable idea that I was not impressing my kinsman favourably, as he gazed at me in solemn silence through a gold-rimmed eyeglass.

No one during the last seven years had given me reason to suppose that my face was one to make glad the heart of man, and I was more depressed than surprised by the dissatisfied expression of the face opposite.

'You are not like your mother,' said my mother's kinsman as he dropped his glass. 'I cannot help saying that I regret the want of resemblance.'

'I regret it too,' I said with sincerity.

'I suppose this regret is not shared by the house of Plunkett—the aristocratic house of Plunkett,' said the Manchester warehouseman. 'That is what your grandfather Smith called it in the letter that announced his daughter's marriage—the aristocratic house of Plunkett.'

'I don't know,' I answered. 'The house of Plunkett never gave me the opportunity of listening to its aristocratic sentiments.'

Mr. Smith uplifted his hands—well-shaped hands in well-fitting black gloves.

'Is it possible,' he exclaimed, 'that you are a stranger to your father's family? Pray, who bore the expense of your education and support since your father's death?'

'Uncle Mick,' I answered.

'Your father's brother, I presume,' said Mr. Smith. 'There was never a Mick in your mother's family.'

If I had not felt so ready to cry I could have laughed at this confusion of uncles.

'My father's brother is called Henry,' I said; 'he offered to send me back second-class to Australia. Michael Murphy was no relation, but he gave me all he had, even his own life.'

'You raise my curiosity,' said Mr. Smith, raising his eyeglass. 'Pray, who was this Michael Murphy?'

'He was the best man in the world,' I answered hastily; and then I told him how Mick had lived and died for me.

'This is very interesting,' said Mr. Smith when he had heard me politely to the end.

I was unreasonably disappointed by his tone of tepid sympathy. I was not then worldly-wise enough to know that he must be the largest-minded and largest-hearted of men who warmly welcomes the idea of any other best man in the world.

'Very interesting, indeed,' repeated Mr. Smith, suppressing a rising yawn with a black glove tip, 'and also very instructive. I hope, my dear girl, that you are duly grateful to Providence, who gave and who took away this praiseworthy Michael Murphy.'

'I can't be grateful, because Mick is dead,' I said, with a rush of blood from heart to face.

My kinsman raised his black right hand in reproof.

'An un-Christian sentiment, Rosamund—an un-Christian, undisciplined sentiment. Try, my dear girl, to see as clearly as I do the unerring wisdom that made Michael Murphy a useful instrument in shaping your early life path, and removed him from the world before you were old enough to be seriously injured by the society of illiterate persons. Consider, too, that if this excellent Murphy were now alive you might not have made any inquiries about your mother's family, in which case you and I would not be travelling together to-day.'

I was not altogether wise enough to appreciate the compensation of this railway journey, but I was not quite foolish enough to raise my voice in vain lament for the 'vanished hand' that was dearer to me than thousands of black kid gloves.

'I will give you one of these,' said Mr. Smith, laying his hand on a heap of newspapers beside him, 'when I have selected something suitable for a young lady's well-regulated eye. Ah, here is a long, and I am sure most instructive report of Professor Stoney's lecture on the pyramids of Egypt.'

'Thank you, Mr. Smith,' I said, with my ill-regulated eye on a paragraph headed 'romantic elopement.'

'Don't call me "Mr. Smith"; it is too formal an address from a kinswoman,' said my kinsman. 'Call me "Cousin Pepper," or, perhaps, considering your age and the position you will occupy in my house, "Uncle Pepper" will be better still. What say you?'

I could not say anything for a moment. A dead voice was in my ear—a dear dead voice, asking in its beautiful brogue if I would 'think bad' of saying 'Uncle Mick.'

'I don't know,' I said chokily. 'I used to call Mick Murphy my uncle.'

'I see why you hesitate,' said my kinsman, who, fortunately, did not in the least see, 'and I think your hesitation very natural and proper, but I assure you it is really needless. I am not so unduly exalted by my present position in life as to object to the same title you bestowed on a man of inferior station in your earlier years. I assure you, my dear

Rosamund, that in a certain sense I look on all honest men as my equals. So not another word of objection. I am your Uncle Pepper from this time forth. And now, my dear niece, what has become of your £5 ?'

I was considerably startled by this quite unexpected question.

'I have some of it still,' I said confusedly ; 'but I have spent most of it.'

'How ?'

As Uncle Pepper asked this question I thought of the other uncle, who had never called me to account about pocket-money.

'I bought a present for Miss Thorn,' I said.

'Right,' said Uncle Pepper, with an approving nod ; 'a well-deserved tribute of respectful regard. Go on.'

'I gave something to each of the servants.'

'Wrong,' said Uncle Pepper, with a disapproving frown. 'The just reward of a servant's work is a servant's wages. This is the only true balance of life, my dear Rosamund,'—here Uncle Pepper's black-gloved hands moved like a gently agitated pair of scales,—'work and wages.'

'But,' I pleaded, 'I had nothing to do with the wages at Thornville, and the servants were often very kind to me.'

'Do not say kind,' said Uncle Pepper. 'A friend may be kind, a servant can only be civil or obliging. There is such a large selection of words in the English language that no educated person has an excuse for using an unsuitable one.'

I was now aware that though I had left a school-

mistress in Ireland I had found a schoolmaster in Wales.

I bent over Professor Stoney's lecture, and was gathering some sort of an idea about the desirability of pyramids as burial-places for confused faces, when Uncle Pepper spoke again.

'I suppose you cannot be expected to recognise the resemblance between your mother's family and myself.'

'No,' I said apologetically. 'I scarcely remember my mother, and I have no recollection of her people. Perhaps I never saw any of them, as I don't think I ever was in Adelaide, where they lived. But I think,' I said, with a faint hope of saying something agreeable, 'I think you are like my grandmother Plunkett.'

There were three points of resemblance between the Manchester warehouseman and the Dublin dowager, — black kid gloves, gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and dissatisfaction with Rosamund Smith Plunkett.

'Like your grandmother Plunkett? Ah, indeed, you flatter me,' said Uncle Pepper, smiling.

It was not a very pleasant smile, but at that stage of my existence I did not know that it was not altogether pleasant for a middle-aged man to be likened to an old woman.

CHAPTER V

‘MISS PLUNKETT OF CASTLE PLUNKETT’

IT would be about as easy for me to build a house as to describe its architecture, and I can no more sketch scenery with ink than I can paint it in oil.

It is therefore fortunate for me at this time of writing that I have nothing remarkable to notice about the architecture of Bryn Hall or the scenery of Llandhul.

Bryn Hall, described in the local guide-book as ‘The residence of Pepper Smith, Esquire, of Manchester,’ was an ordinary white stone house, with many plate-glass windows, standing in an acre of treeless lawn. There was nothing ancestral about Bryn Hall. It was built by a London speculator, and bought as soon as it was built by Pepper Smith of Manchester, who fancied a Welsh residence, and considered sea air wholesome.

There was a popular saying that Llandhul was remarkable for nothing but shrimps and sunsets. Pepper Smith had no sentiment to spare for sunsets, and no digestion to waste on shrimps, but he had reasons of his own for preferring Llandhul to many more celebrated places in the principality.

Llandhul was within comparatively easy reach of the Manchester warehouse, and Llandhul society suited the Manchester warehouseman.

Pepper Smith was an ambitious man—ambitious not only of social importance, but of social supremacy. He was also a sensible man—sensible enough to know that among the aristocracy of a Welsh county a Manchester warehouseman had small chance of importance, and no chance at all of supremacy.

So instead of purchasing the picturesque old castle of a decayed county family, and becoming less than the least of county squires, he bought the London speculator's newly-built house near the railway station, and became the greatest of Llandhul townsmen.

Llandhul was a very young town, but wonderfully well-grown for its age. It owed nothing of its prosperity to its own Welsh county, and everything to the commercial cities of Lancashire, whose trippers crowded its lodging-houses, danced on its pier, and rode its donkeys from the beginning of June to the end of August.

The resident gentlefolk occupied detached houses or semi-detached villas within sight of the sea, but beyond the sound of vulgar seaside voices. Most of the houses belonged to Lancashire merchants. Most of the villas were rented by half-pay officers, superannuated clergymen, highly respectable widows, and intensely genteel spinsters.

In this society Pepper Smith was supreme. He was richer than any of the merchants, more commanding in manner than any of the officers, more sternly orthodox in opinion than any of the clergymen, and set up as a king by the widows and

spinsters—in the room of the vicar, dethroned by recent marriage.

'The carriage will not meet us at the station,' said Pepper Smith as we neared our journey's end. I was no deafer than I had been at the beginning, so I could not help thinking that my kinsman had raised his voice for the benefit of passengers who had entered our compartment at the last station. 'I told the coachman that I would walk as usual, and the railway people will send up your luggage to the Hall. The distance is very short, and, if possible, one should always avoid ostentation.'

The distance was certainly very short. In less than five minutes Mr. Pepper Smith had affably acknowledged the politeness of the station-master's bow, and graciously accepted the tribute of his own lodge-woman's curtsy.

'My son awaits our arrival,' said Pepper Smith, waving his hand towards the house. 'He did not appear at the station because he did not choose to gratify public curiosity.'

I could not at that moment see how the appearance of a young man who must often have been seen at Llandhul station could be any special gratification to public curiosity. But when that young man lowered his head to meet my hand, and raised my hand to meet his lips, I was glad he had advanced no further than his own doorway to meet me.

'Welcome home, my cousin Rosamund,' he said in what seemed to my ear a slightly foreign accent, as he led me from the outer gloom to the inner light.

If it were unusual for a young man to kiss the hand of a young woman, I did not know it. Certainly

no other young man had ever kissed my hand ; but then I was not acquainted with any other young man. For all I knew, hand-kissing might be as ordinary a ceremony between young men and young women as hand-shaking, and yet I was glad my cousin Eugene's salute had not been made at the railway station.

Eugene led me through the brilliantly-lighted hall into the still more brilliant drawing-room, where he placed me in an amber satin chair, and released my hand with a bow that I did not then know was lower than young men were wont to make.

The amber chair was under the full blaze of a many-globed crystal gasolier, and Eugene, standing before me, gazed as his father had gazed in the railway carriage, though without the aid of an eyeglass.

Eugene and his father had one point of resemblance, otherwise they were strangely unlike.

Pepper Smith had the head of a sculptured senator. His son Eugene had the face of a painted cherub. Pepper was above the average height of man. Eugene was below that height. Pepper was dark. Eugene was fair. It was not easy to believe that Pepper had ever looked like a boy. It was harder to believe that Eugene would ever look like a man. Eugene was even then a man in years, but the round, pink-skinned, small-featured face was like the face of a baby boy.

'He is too pretty for a boy,' I thought, and at the same moment I was convinced that he thought I was not pretty enough for a girl.

It was in the blue eyes that Eugene's only resemblance to his father lay, and to my uncomfort-

able imagination those eyes expressed the same dissatisfaction with my personal appearance that had depressed but not surprised me in the railway carriage.

'Papa,' said Eugene, turning from me to his father, 'I think we have made a mistake. I am afraid we must change. Shall you object very much, dear papa?'

I wondered a little if a young man generally called his father 'dear papa.' I wondered much what this young man was so anxious to change. Could it possibly be my newly-arrived self? If so, where should I go, and where would the other adopted next-of-kin come from?

Pepper Smith laid his now ungloved hand on his son's head. It was a very fair head, with curling ends of long hair falling over the collar of a black velvet coat.

'Do I ever object to anything you wish, my darling?' he asked.

'Never,' said the son, rising on tiptoe to kiss the father's cheek.

I felt almost certain that fathers did not generally 'darling' their grown-up sons, and that grown-up sons were not in the habit of kissing their fathers.

I was almost persuaded that the little scene between this father and son was laughable, but it did not make me laugh. The expression of their love might be ridiculous, but the love itself was surely sublime.

'I do not object, my own boy,' said the father, stroking the fair head as caressingly as if the boy he owned were twenty-one months instead of twenty-

one years. 'However I may deplore the expense perhaps needlessly incurred, I do not object to any change you may deem necessary.'

I wondered if he referred to the expense of bringing me over on approval from Ireland.

'Perhaps it will not be necessary,' said Eugene musingly.

His blue eyes were now in my direction, wandering from the crown of my hat to the hem of my long jacket.

Hat and jacket were both brown, neatly but not very becomingly shaped, and of a shade more serviceable than suitable.

'Dear cousin Rosamund, is it rudely inquisitive of me to ask if you have an evening frock with you?'

'Not at all,' I answered readily. 'I have a blue cashmere that I used to wear at the breaking-up parties.'

'Light blue or dark blue?' asked Eugene anxiously.

'Light,' I answered. 'A lovely sky-blue.'

'A lovely sky-blue,' murmured Eugene. 'Oh, Rosamund, dear cousin Rosamund, will you put it on this evening?'

'Certainly, if you wish it.'

'I do wish it.'

Eugene clasped his soft white hands together as if he prayed it.

'Put it on for tea,' said Uncle Pepper, nodding his head at me. 'We have no late dinner at Bryn Hall. We do not approve of late dinners; do we, Eugene?'

'I do not approve of the conventional dinner coat,' said Eugene. 'If we dined at seven I should dress.'

In my ignorance I thought Eugene could not be more dressed than he was at that moment in his beautiful coat of silk velvet.

'Velvet is so much more picturesque than cloth ; is it not, my cousin ?' said Eugene.

I had not then studied the picturesque in male attire, so I could only murmur something about a general admiration for velvet, while I thought what I did not say, that the cherub-faced, velvet-coated young man before me looked very like a picture.

'With me,' said Uncle Pepper, 'an early dinner is a matter not only of preference but of principle. My present position'—here Uncle Pepper uplifted his head—'my present position gives me influence'—here Uncle Pepper spread forth his hands as one who swims. 'Now, I hold that influence as a talent for which I am accountable, and I trust I do not use it unprofitably. When I first came to this neighbourhood, and found men with fewer hundreds a year than I have thousands dining at seven, I at once set the example of a one-o'clock dinner. My motto is, "Put down pretence," and I do not know of any more miserably mean pretence than a supper of mutton-chop served up at seven o'clock and called dinner. Eugene, ring the bell.'

The ring was answered by a pale-faced, dark-eyed maid-servant, in the blackest of gowns and the whitest of caps and aprons.

'Morgan,' said Uncle Pepper, 'conduct Miss Plunkett to her room, and give her any assistance

she may require. You can then inform your fellow-servants that Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett has arrived. You understand, Morgan, Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Morgan, with a curtsy to me, ‘Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett.’

‘What a lovely bloom on your cheek, my cousin!’ murmured Eugene as he held the door open for my exit.

I owed that outward and visible bloom to an inward and spiritual irritation, caused by the unlovely idea that Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett was a more miserably mean pretence than a mutton-chop dinner at seven.

However, when I reached my room every feeling but pleasure was cast out of my mind. It was a prettily-furnished, daintily-upholstered room, its dressing-table set forth with ornaments that were like the wedding presents of society journals, numerous and costly.

‘They are beautiful, yes, indeed, miss,’ said Morgan, as I delightedly fingered gold-topped scent bottles, silver-framed hand mirrors, and ivory-backed brushes, ‘and Mr. Eugene is a beautiful young gentleman.’

‘He is very kind,’ I said gratefully, concluding that I owed the beauty of my present surroundings to Eugene’s kindness.

‘Yes, indeed, miss, he is very kind,’ assented Morgan. ‘He is more like a young lady than a young gentleman, he is indeed.’

I did not think this was the high compliment to Eugene that Morgan evidently intended it to be. I

had lived for seven years among young ladies who were not kind.

'I will dress you, Miss Plunkett,' said Morgan. 'I am good to make the young ladies look nice, I am indeed. I did live with very highly people before I came to Llandhul town. Mr. Smith is a very highly gentleman; oh yes, miss, he is indeed, but in the country I did live with young ladies of a castle just like you, Miss Plunkett.'

Like me!

Again my cheeks burned in the way Eugene had called lovely. I wanted to tell Morgan that I was not the young lady of a castle, but I hesitated about throwing an unbecoming shadow on the veracity of Morgan's master, and while I hesitated the opportunity was lost.

'I like to wait on the young ladies,' said Morgan, who seemed to like the English language, 'but I am very old myself—yes, indeed, miss, I am twenty-four.'

I, to whom Morgan gave that assurance, was then seventeen. I have this day to confess myself more than seventeen years older, and now, as I write this true tale, I hear Morgan assuring one who is filling up a census paper that she is indeed twenty-four.

CHAPTER VI

HARMONY

EUGENE met me at the foot of the stairs, and conducted me on his velvet-sleeved arm to the dining-room, where Uncle Pepper was waiting to say grace.

‘Dear papa, I am sure it will do,’ said Eugene, with a radiant smile that lingered on his face even while he bent his head in thankfulness for what we were about to receive.

I wondered in my ignorant mind how this luxurious meal of fish, flesh, and fowl could differ from the dinner to which Uncle Pepper objected on principle, but supposed that the silver tea service before which I was placed made all the difference.

‘I believe our English high tea is a thing almost unknown in Ireland,’ said Uncle Pepper as he carved a roast chicken. ‘Now, I daresay, my dear Rosamund, a meal such as this would be considered quite vulgar at Castle Plunkett, and I suppose your Uncle Henry could not digest his dinner unless he was served by a butler.’

‘I don’t know,’ I began, with the intention of

saying that I did not know anything about Castle Plunkett or my Uncle Henry, but I was stopped before any such explanation could enlighten Uncle Pepper's parlour-maid.

'When your Uncle Henry passes this way,' said Uncle Pepper, taking bread sauce from the parlour-maid, 'we must persuade him to stop at Bryn Hall and see how an unpretending Manchester warehouseman lives. A new experience for Mr. Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, eh, Rosamund?'

'I don't know,' I began again, with the intention of declaring myself unable to offer any opinion about the experiences of Mr. Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, and again I was stopped.

'Do you drink wine, Rosamund?' asked Uncle Pepper, with his hand on the sherry decanter beside him.

'No, thank you,' I answered.

'Very good,' said Uncle Pepper. 'Total abstinence at your age is natural and right. At your age, and for many years afterwards, I was a total abstainer. I would be a total abstainer still if total abstinence were not so sadly mixed up with Radical politics and Dissenting views. Now as a matter of choice I would ask you for a second cup of tea, but as a matter of principle I will help myself to a glass of sherry. There is sanctity in a glass of sherry,' said Uncle Pepper, taking a solemn sip, 'when it is a Conservative Churchman's protest against Radicals and Dissenters.'

'I love some wines,' murmured Eugene, 'wines that are beautiful to the eye, like sparkling Burgundy, and delicious to the taste, like sweet champagne, but

I do not drink them. I drink milk, because it is more beautifying to the complexion than wine. Milk is very beautifying ; is it not, Rosamund ?'

'I don't know,' I said, employing that brilliant sentence for the third time.

'Don't you ?' asked Eugene, with wide-open blue eyes. 'Perhaps you have never seriously considered the influence of diet on complexion. I have made the subject a special study, and the answers to correspondents in various periodicals have provided me with many valuable rules of diet. The keeping of them often involves self-denial, but self-denial is easy for Beauty's dear sake. Oh, Rosamund, if the life is more than meat, is not beauty more than the life ?'

'I don't know,' I said for the fourth time. I felt unequal to making any brighter remark on a subject that I thought concerned me so little as Beauty.

By the bye, I had not then learned to spell beauty with a capital B.

'You children may as well adjourn to the drawing-room for further discussion of this interesting subject while I read the evening papers,' said Uncle Pepper as he rose from the table and drew an arm-chair to the fire.

I took advantage of the parlour-maid's absence to relieve my mind of a weight that I had not been able to throw off in her presence.

'Uncle Pepper,' I said, 'please excuse me for reminding you that I am not Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett. I don't know anything about Castle Plunkett, and I don't think my Uncle Henry would like me to connect myself with it.'

I spoke with the old school-girl feeling of standing up with an ill-prepared lesson, and Uncle Pepper listened with the severe countenance of a displeased schoolmaster.

'Now, Rosamund,' he said, raising his glass to his searching eye, 'who has the better claim to your consideration—Henry Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, or Pepper Smith of Bryn Hall?'

Before I could answer, Eugene's arms were round his father's neck, and Eugene's voice was at his father's ear.

'Papa, dear papa, don't be angry with Rosamund. Oh, papa! you will make me so unhappy if you are angry with Rosamund.'

Pepper Smith's face softened as it only softened under the influence of his son.

'I am not angry, dear boy.'

He had dropped his eyeglass the moment Eugene touched him, and now he held out his hand to me with a smile.

'Come here, Rosamund, and tell me what your Uncle Henry offered you.'

'A second-class passage to Australia,' I said, smiling in my turn as my hand touched that of the man who had made more generous offers.

'Well, now,' said Uncle Pepper, 'as I am willing to pay your first-class expenses through life as far as we journey together, I consider myself at liberty to label you as I choose, and I have labelled you Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett. Don't be afraid to laugh, Rosamund. I am a serious man in a general way, but I like a little harmless pleasantry, and I hope you and I may sometimes laugh together with

the refined mirth of first-class passengers. Now go with Eugene.'

'Come, dear cousin,' said Eugene, taking my hand as if we were children dismissed to our play.

In the drawing-room I was placed by Eugene in the same amber chair I had occupied on my first arrival, and regarded by Eugene with the same intent gaze, but with a different expression of eye.

'It is perfect,' he said after a long pause. 'There need be no change. Oh, Rosamund, I was so afraid you would not harmonise with our new furniture, but it was only your very unbecoming travelling dress that marred the harmony. You heard my dear father say I might change the satin if I wished. It is nearly new, and very costly, and I chose it because the colour is beautiful in itself; but it must have been changed if you had not harmonised with it. Now I am happy, and papa will be glad. Oh, Rosamund, if you could only see as I do the delicious effect of your pale blue frock and creamy neck against that amber satin chair back!'

'I am glad you are pleased,' I said, with some embarrassment and much gratification; 'but I did not think people ever thought of harmonising girls with chairs.'

'People don't,' said Eugene, with a sigh, 'but I do. I am of an æsthetic disposition.'

The word æsthetic was strange to me in those dark days before the gospel according to Oscar Wilde was publicly preached. I did not know what Eugene meant, and said I did not.

'I have an inordinate love of the Beautiful,' said Eugene. 'Beauty is a necessity of my existence,

and Harmony is Beauty's first law. Do you write poetry, Rosamund ?'

To this I replied in the familiar words of the man who was asked if he could play the fiddle, that I had never tried.

'I try,' said Eugene, with a sigh. 'I have beautiful thoughts, but I strive in vain to clothe them in language as graceful as Tennyson's.'

'I don't think many people can write like Tennyson,' I said encouragingly.

'Many people can't, of course,' said Eugene, who seemed more injured than encouraged. 'What good would our lives be if we were of the many? Many people are not beautiful.'

'Very few,' I said, sighing in my turn; 'but I hope my life will be some good though I am one of the many.'

Eugene looked at me with wondering blue eyes.

'Is it possible you don't know that you are beautiful?'

Which question I answered after the manner of my old enemy Biddy by asking another.

'Is it possible that I am?'

'You are beautiful,' said Eugene. 'Oh, Rosamund, how delicious it must be to hear for the first time that one is beautiful!'

Delicious it certainly was. Delicious as the lawyer's letter that tells the pauper he is a millionaire—delicious as the publisher's cheque for a manuscript often declined with thanks.

'I always knew I was beautiful,' said Eugene. 'I almost wish I had not always known. The joy of hearing it for the first time must be so exceedingly

great. Yet—no, I could not have lived for twenty-one years without the joy that the assurance of beauty alone can give. Rosamund, why do you laugh?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ I said, repenting my show of mirth when I saw the pained look on the fair boyish face of one who had just given me pleasure. ‘I am sorry for laughing, but it seemed so funny to hear you talk like that about being beautiful.’

‘I accept your apology, Rosamund,’ said Eugene, speaking for the moment in a voice wonderfully like his father’s, ‘though I fail to see anything laughable in my own words. Why should it be funny of me to say, “I am beautiful”? Would it be ridiculous of a millionaire to say, “I am rich”? Would it be absurd of a king to say, “I am royal”? Were I to say that I considered myself unbeautiful I would be a liar, and I cannot lie, because a lie is ugly, and truth is inseparable from the Beauty that I live to worship.’

My school-girl orthodoxy was slightly shocked by what seemed like a confession of idolatry, but I have lived to see professing Christians bowing down before falser gods than the beauty worshipped by Eugene.

‘Let us have some music,’ said Uncle Pepper when he joined us. ‘Are you a skilled musician, Rosamund?’

‘Not at all,’ I answered shamefacedly.

‘Then I will not ask you to perform before my son. Eugene, go to the piano and play.’

Eugene went and played as I never heard any one play before. He played a sonata of Mozart that had hitherto seemed only so many long pages of

tiresome practice to my unloving fingers, but was now full of such strangely sweet meaning that the faint soul for music stirred for the first time within me and filled my eyes with tears.

'You love music, Rosamund,' said Eugene, suddenly turning his own shining eyes on me.

'I always thought I hated it,' I answered, 'but I love it as you play.'

'My playing is beautiful,' said Eugene, 'but I am not quite happy in my music, because I have no voice. Do you sing, Rosamund?'

'I have learned a few songs,' I said humbly, 'but I don't know whether I can sing or not.'

'You will know when you have sung to my accompaniment,' said Eugene, with a radiant smile. 'To-morrow, dear cousin, we will practise together.'

At ten o'clock Eugene again led me to the dining-room, where the servants were assembled, and the master conducted family worship with the dignity of a bishop.

'Papa,' said Eugene as I held out my hand for good-night, 'may I kiss my cousin's cheek?'

'By your cousin's leave,' said Uncle Pepper, smiling.

'May I, cousin?' asked Eugene, with a pleading pressure of the hand.

I did not see why he might not kiss my cheek, as he had kissed my hand. For all I knew it was permitted to all young men so to kiss all the young women related to them. Such kissing might be as holy as the kiss of early Christian greeting commanded by St. Paul, and yet I had an unreasonable objection to the proposed kiss.

'Not yet,' I stammered, feeling my face very hot

as I withdrew my hand from Eugene's soft clasp. 'Oh, please, I think I would rather not yet.'

Eugene turned away like a hurt child, but Uncle Pepper, while he laid a soothing hand on the fair head, did not cease to smile.

'A very proper answer, Rosamund, my dear girl,' he said, with an approving nod. 'Not yet—a most sensible reply—very well said, indeed—not yet.'

CHAPTER VII

THE STATUE OF QUEEN VICTORIA

‘I SUPPOSE you have a man to mind the shop?’

I made this remark at breakfast-time when Uncle Pepper told me he was not going to Manchester that day, and intended to keep away from business for the first week or two of my residence at Bryn Hall. It seemed to me such a simple and suitable remark that I was startled by the effect it produced. Uncle Pepper, laying down knife and fork on his plate of cold ham, stared at me with severe surprise. Eugene, lifting dreamy eyes from a harmony of brown bread and golden syrup, looked anxiously at me and pleadingly at his father.

‘The — what did you say, Rosamund?’ asked Uncle Pepper, raising his eyeglass.

Dimly conscious of a mistake, I answered, ‘The warehouse.’

‘That was not the term you employed at first,’ said Uncle Pepper, with magisterial severity.

‘I beg your pardon,’ I stammered, ‘but I thought a shop and a warehouse were both the same.’

‘State your reason for so thinking,’ said Uncle Pepper.

He spoke with the stern command of an examining professor of logic, and I answered with the nervousness of a candidate bound to be plucked.

'The shop where Miss Thorn bought bacon was called an Italian warehouse.'

Uncle Pepper lowered his glass with a smile, the sort of smile that is so much more appalling than a frown.

'Dear papa,' pleaded Eugene, 'don't be angry.'

'Dear boy,' said his father, 'I am not angry, I am amused—extremely amused. Your cousin Rosamund's confusion of Manchester and Italian warehouses is an excellent joke. No doubt, she has already pictured me serving at a bacon counter in a white apron. Pray, Miss Plunkett, do you know the difference between a brewer and a publican?'

I humbly confessed that I had no very clear idea of the difference.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett,' said Uncle Pepper, in the voice of a judge passing sentence, 'you have much to learn.'

There was a flavour of bitter herbs in the rest of my breakfast, and at prayer-time I was weighed down by the conviction that 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding' for which Uncle Pepper emphatically petitioned was considered my special need.

'Dear cousin,' murmured Eugene as we stood together at a window far from the fireside where Uncle Pepper was reading a morning paper, 'I scarcely comprehend the matter myself. Trade small or great is the same ugly thing to me, but to papa the great trade is beautiful, and I smother my feelings.'

‘Do you ever go to the warehouse?’ I asked.

Eugene regarded me with eyes full of soft reproach.

‘Rosamund, do you think I could ever be in harmony with a Manchester warehouse?’

‘Please remember,’ I said, ‘that I have yet to learn what a Manchester warehouse is.’

‘It is ugly,’ said Eugene.

‘Then, of course, it can’t suit you,’ I said in what I meant for a jesting tone.

‘Of course not,’ said Eugene, with the gravity of one who does not appreciate certain kinds of humour.

‘What are you going to be?’ I asked.

‘I desire to be a great poet, but papa does not encourage me,’ he answered, as if nothing but paternal discouragement stood in the way of his poetic greatness. ‘Papa desired me to be a clergyman, till he knew that I could only be happy in one of the beautiful churches where the clergy wear beautiful vestments. Papa does not approve of such churches, and is unhappy if I speak of them, but he loves me too well to force me into the ugly black gown that he considers becoming to a preacher.’

‘Don’t all preachers wear black gowns?’ I asked, remembering how the Rev. Robert Maguire, and all who had ever preached in his church, had changed from white to black before mounting the pulpit.

‘No,’ said Eugene. ‘Our vicar preaches in his surplice, and that is the only subject of discord between him and papa. The Vicar’s surplice is of a dreadful shape, but it is less hurtful to my eye than the awful black gown,’—Eugene shuddered; ‘but we

will not talk of that. You ask me, dear cousin, what I am going to be? I do not think I shall pursue any particular calling. I am not under the vulgar necessity of earning money, and I desire life-long leisure to think beautiful thoughts, read beautiful books, play beautiful music, and gaze on beautiful objects.'

'Llandhul does not look beautiful from here,' I said as I looked out on the sand-hills, and compared them with the Dublin mountains, visible from the back windows of Thornville.

'Llandhul is not beautiful, but I can endure its ugliness for papa's sake,' said Eugene, looking the picture of ideal martyrdom. 'I would rather live at ugly Llandhul with papa than without him in the beautiful Swiss village of my birth.'

'Were you born in Switzerland?' I asked in some surprise.

'Yes, it was my mother's country. She came to England as a teacher of music, and lodged in the house of my father's mother. She was happy in her marriage, but she pined in smoky Manchester for the pure air of her own mountain village. There I was born, and there she died.'

Uncle Pepper's gold-rimmed eyeglass and black kid gloves had somewhat shaken the simple yeoman theory, and I now perceived the error of my imagination in marrying my mother's rejected lover to the daughter of his Manchester employer.

'Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper from the distant fireplace, as he laid down his newspaper, 'you need something more than a school-girl's wardrobe for your present position. Let us all go to Liverpool this

morning. Eugene will help you to choose your gowns and bonnets.'

Eugene clapped his hands with childish delight.

'Dear papa, what pleasure you propose! What happiness, to help in the adornment of this rose of the world.'

'It's a pity human roses don't grow their own frocks,' said Uncle Pepper, with a smile that assured me he had indulged in some of the harmless pleasantry at which I had his general permission to laugh.

As we had breakfasted early, and the morning train was a fast one, we were in Liverpool while the January day was young enough to give plenty of light for shopping, and I had what the girls in American story-books call 'a good time.'

O ye Liverpool girls, who read this truthful tale, imagine as ye only can what a good time it was to me!

I was seventeen. I was shopping in Bold Street. I was accompanied by a cousin who loved the beautiful, and an uncle who was ready to pay for it.

'Twelve guineas,' said the elegantly-dressed young woman who was displaying Paris costumes, 'but'—with what I fancied a supercilious overlook of my Thornville-clad form—'we can copy this model in less expensive materials.'

'I am sure the copy would be very nice,' I said, alarmed by the sound of a sum that had hitherto more than sufficed for a year's entire clothing.

Uncle Pepper answered me not, but looked at Eugene.

'I infinitely prefer originals to copies,' said Eugene, 'and this model is beautiful.'

'Then we decide on the model,' said Uncle Pepper, 'and need no further suggestion about copies.'

The elegant young woman bowed in graceful approval, and exhibited other models, some rather more, some rather less expensive.

Uncle Pepper's purse was lightened of fifty pounds when we turned away from the Paris costumes, and there was very little change out of another large note when Eugene had exercised his æsthetic taste in the way of fur-trimmed jackets and feathered hats.

'Oh, please, don't let him buy anything more for me.'

Thus I entreated Uncle Pepper in the shop of a French glover, where Eugene, having selected a variety of shades in the best kid, was now contemplating a glass case of painted fans.

'I never limit my son's pleasures,' said Uncle Pepper, taking another bank-note from his purse.

Shopping is not a tedious business when æsthetic taste and ready money go to market together, and the January daylight was still bright when we had done with the Bold Street shops.

'We will dine at the Adelphi,' said Uncle Pepper. 'We will finish our morning in Liverpool with a first-rate hotel dinner, and let the waiters and all who are concerned see that Pepper Smith of Manchester is not ashamed of dining in the middle of the day.'

'Dear papa,' said Eugene, 'pray excuse me from dinner. I do not care about dining, and I wish to take a Turkish bath, so with your permission I will leave you and Rose to dine together, and join you at the railway station.'

'As you please, my boy,' said his father, and Eugene, uncovering his fair head, bowed low and left us.

'As Eugene does not care to dine, why should we?' asked Uncle Pepper.

I did not know any reason for dining but my own great hunger, so I said nothing.

'We will go in here and have some cakes and coffee,' said Uncle Pepper, turning into an unprefending confectioner's.

We seated ourselves at a little round table in the shop, and Uncle Pepper gave his order.

'Two cups of coffee—small cups, and four cakes—penny cakes.'

I drank my small cup of coffee, wishing it were larger, and ate my two cakes, wishing they were three.

'What is this?' asked Uncle Pepper, regarding through his eyeglass the little paper on which the items of our little feast were pencilled.

'Tenpence, sir,' said the young person in attendance, a heavy-eyed girl in mourning that looked new. 'Two small coffees, fourpence, two Eccles cakes, tuppence, and two jam sandwiches, fourpence. I forgot about the jam sandwiches being tuppence each, sir.'

'I ordered four penny cakes,' said Uncle Pepper, 'and I will pay according to my order.'

Then advancing to the counter, he laid down a shilling, and addressed himself to the mistress of the shop.

'I will trouble you for fourpence change, madam. I cannot be responsible for the mistakes of your assistants.'

'Certainly not, sir,' said madam, handing him four coppers, with a look at her assistant that showed how the responsibility question would be settled.

I felt much pity for the heavy-eyed girl in the mourning that looked so fresh, and much surprise that the man who had calmly spent so many pounds should make such a commotion about a few pence.

'That careless young woman has had a valuable lesson,' said Uncle Pepper as we left the shop, 'and this fourpence will pay our boat fare to Birkenhead and back. This afternoon is so wonderfully clear that a sail is tempting, and we have nearly two hours to spare before we meet Eugene at the station ; but first I will show you St. George's Hall.'

Just then a man suddenly turning the corner of a side street collided with me, and was hastily apologising when he and Uncle Pepper became aware of each other.

'Ah, Westropp,' said Uncle Pepper, shaking hands, 'I suppose you have been seeing that young rascal of a Larkin safely out of the country.'

'Yes,' said the man addressed as Westropp, 'I thought it was well to make sure that he was on the ship at sailing time. I hope he will do better in the new country than he has done in the old.'

'I hope so,' said Uncle Pepper, in a tone by no means hopeful. 'Did you tell him that I would not have let him off so easily if he were not a clergyman's son.'

'Oh yes,' said Mr. Westropp, 'I told him all that, and he invited me to drink to the memory of the bishop who had ordained his father.'

'Most ill-timed levity,' said Uncle Pepper, shak-

ing his head. 'Enough of Larkin. Let us change the subject. John Westropp, if I inform you that the name of the young lady by my side is Rosamund Smith Plunkett, you must not consider yourself introduced to her. It is bad manners to introduce in the street.'

'Very bad, indeed,' assented Mr. Westropp, 'and as the young lady by your side is at an age when an example of good manners is most important, I wish it to be understood that I am not raising my hat to her, but to the statue of Queen Victoria over at St. George's Hall.'

But as he lifted his hat he looked at me and not towards St. George's Hall.

Why was I at that moment uncomfortably conscious of my unbecoming school hat? Why did I wish I had on my head some of the lately-purchased French millinery?

The man who looked at me was neither handsome nor young. His face would, I thought, have been quite ugly but for a pair of soft brown eyes, and he was at least double my age.

I told myself afterwards that I was only vexed because I looked like a school-girl, and that I only desired a more important appearance in the eyes of this plain middle-aged man because such an appearance would have commanded more of the respect due to a young woman in her eighteenth year.

'Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper, 'Mr. John Westropp is the man who minds the shop, and now he has left the shop to mind itself. Ah, my dear Westropp, you don't understand that little joke about the shop. It is capital, I assure you. We

shall have a hearty laugh over it when you come to Llandhul.'

'That will be on Monday,' said Mr. Westropp; 'your Vicar has me down for "Little Dombey" on the penny-reading programme arranged for that evening. The prospect of an introduction to Miss Plunkett and a capital joke will make life worth living for the next half week. And now, having just time to catch my train at Edgehill, I will take the liberty of again saluting the statue of the Queen Victoria.'

He raised his hat again and smiled at me. His mouth was large, but he had a good set of teeth.

If I bowed and smiled in acknowledgment of the salute, it must have been because I unconsciously assumed the part of Queen Victoria, so naturally played in my younger days.

My younger days! Why had the sight of this strange man brought them so near me?

Why did the Liverpool of to-day, where Paris frocks were bought, seem less real than the Liverpool of ten years ago, where Mick in his 'shoot o' black' walked with Mrs. Kelly in a green shawl?

Why was the sail to Birkenhead more remindful of life on board the *Conqueror* than the passage to Holyhead had been?

I was still perplexed with these questions when we arrived back at Lime Street Station, where Eugene met us with a very pink and white face.

'Turkish baths are beautifying to the complexion,' he said as we started on our homeward way in the first-class carriage we had all to ourselves.

‘I wonder if they would beautify John Westropp,’ said Uncle Pepper.

‘Ah, poor John,’ murmured Eugene compassionately; ‘it is sad to be so nearly ugly, but his eyes are beautiful. I am always rejoiced to think of his beautiful eyes.’

‘Rosamund,’ said Uncle Pepper, turning his eyeglass on me, ‘do you consider John Westropp’s eyes beautiful?’

‘I think they are good eyes,’ I said, ‘and I think—but, of course, I must be wrong—and I don’t exactly think.’

Uncle Pepper stared at me severely.

‘A very confused sentence, Rosamund—an absurdly disjointed sentence. Pray, put whatever you think or don’t think into a clear form of words.’

‘My thoughts are not clear,’ I said apologetically. ‘I am confused by the idea that Mr. Westropp’s eyes are familiar to me, and I fancy I have seen Mr. Westropp before.’

Uncle Pepper dropped his glass.

‘A very absurd idea,’ he said decidedly. ‘Don’t be fanciful, Rosamund. I have no patience with fanciful girls.’

CHAPTER VIII

‘THE MAN THAT MINDS THE SHOP’

As a rule, there were not many young men visible in Llandhul society. The Lancashire lads who joined resident families at the detached houses on Saturday returned on Monday to their lodgings near Manchester warehouses or Liverpool offices. The retired clergymen and half-pay officers of the semi-detached villas had to look beyond the little Welsh watering-place for the gentlemanly employment desirable for their sons.

On Sunday, however, the leading Manchester and Liverpool tailors were fairly well advertised on Llandhul promenade after morning service, and on week-days there was always a remnant of youths as yet unprovided by clerical and military influence with more profitable employment than the measurement of Llandhul pavements.

Altogether there were young men enough in Llandhul society to form my opinion of the average young man, who, I soon perceived, was quite a different sort of young man from my cousin Eugene.

‘No other young man in Llandhul called his father ‘dear papa.’

The Lancashire merchants were all 'governors' or 'old boys' to their sons.

The son of Archdeacon Goodman's old age spoke of his reverend parent as 'the fire escape.'

Colonel Gunn was only 'the relieving officer' to his billiard-playing boys.

Eugene was not in harmony with the young men who shouted 'jolly' when he would have murmured 'beautiful,' and who despised his curling ends of hair as much as he detested their close-cropped heads.

He was a great favourite with the fathers of the community, who praised his exceptional filial piety and his general deference to elders, while women old and young admired his cherub face and his courteous manners.

Female society in Llandhul was, as I afterwards found by comparison, much the same as in every other country town.

There were matrons wise and matrons foolish, old maids sweet and old maids sour, young maids fast and young maids slow.

All were more or less interested in the state of the marriage market, and nearly all inclined to the opinion that the Vicar's marriage was a failure.

The Vicar, a remarkably handsome, wonderfully young-looking man of forty, had lately married a Yorkshire cousin to whom he had long been attached, but whose conscientious doubts about her own desirability as a clergyman's wife had long stood in the way of their mutual happiness. Though at last persuaded into the marriage, she still doubted her fitness for the high calling of vicaress, and her doubts were fully shared by many widows and

spinsters, who each knew at least one woman more worthy of the position.

It was the general opinion at semi-detached villa tea-tables that Mrs. Lloyd Jones was not 'spiritually minded,' and the Vicar's wife honestly confessed that she was more interested in soup-kitchens than Sunday Schools.

The Vicar's choice was more approvingly discussed in the poor districts of the town, where the Vicar's wife was welcomed as a cheerful giver.

However questionable her spirituality may have been, there was nothing doubtful about her soup.

She was a woman of thirty or thereabouts, with a neck and shoulders that made one always wish to see her in the evening dress of the period, and a face that, if not entirely handsome, was altogether lovely in the eyes of those who loved her.

'I am so glad we have secured Mr. Westropp for Monday evening,' she said at the end of her first call on me. 'With his Dickens and Mr. Eugene's Mozart we shall have a regular field-night. I have been very anxious about the success of the affair, as I have persuaded the ruling powers to let the proceeds go towards a new boat for poor old Owen Thomas.'

'I scarcely think it consistent of church people to support the cause of Owen Thomas,' said Uncle Pepper. 'Pray, Mrs. Lloyd Jones, am I not right in supposing him to be a Liberal and a Dissenter?'

Mrs. Lloyd Jones smiled. It was not a sweet smile. Some smiles are too sweet to be wholesome. Mrs. Lloyd Jones's smile was too wholesome to be sweet.

'I believe,' she said, 'Owen Thomas has in his time been liberal enough to support the five orphans of another boatman, and has always strongly dissented from the opinion that he did anything more than his duty towards his neighbour.'

I did not know anything about penny readings, but supposed they were entertainments for the lower orders of the 'come-in-your-working-clothes' kind.

'Morgan,' I said on the Monday afternoon, 'I suppose I need not dress for tea to-night, as we are going to the penny readings directly afterwards.'

'Oh, you must dress,' said Morgan; 'yes, indeed, miss, you must dress, but not for the evening. The new French dress you did wear at church yesterday becomes you gracefully. Put that on, Miss Plunkett, my dear.'

'Oh, Morgan,' I exclaimed, 'how ridiculous to wear a twelve-guinea dress at a penny reading!'

'The front seats are sixpence,' said Morgan, 'and all the highly people of Llandhul will be there.'

So I donned my twelve-guinea costume, glad to be justified in so doing. I will not describe the style thereof, lest I provoke the derision of a girl generation yet unborn when it was designed. Suffice it to say that it fitted my figure and harmonised with the drawing-room furniture.

'Was it not kind of my uncle to buy me so many beautiful clothes?' I said as Morgan congratulated me on my appearance.

'Yes, miss,' said Morgan; 'oh yes, miss, the master is very kind to Mr. Eugene.'

Morgan always dressed me in time to practise

my songs with Eugene before tea, and I now descended to the drawing-room for that purpose.

'You sing with beautiful expression, dear cousin,' said Eugene, as he struck the last chord of 'When sparrows build.'

'Oh, Eugene,' I exclaimed, 'I never sang before as I sing to your accompaniment! When you played the last line I seemed to see the dead rising from the deep.'

Eugene looked at me with a radiant smile.

'Dear Rose, you have, like me, the artistic temperament. What a beautiful bond of sympathy!' And he raised my hand to his lips.

'Very effective, indeed,' said a voice at the half-open door, and I felt myself blushing like the school-girl that was the last character in which I wished to appear before Mr. John Westropp.

For John Westropp's brown eyes and John Westropp's white teeth met my view as I turned my startled head.

'I did not know there were any tableaux in this evening's programme,' he said, advancing, 'and I must apologise for coming without invitation to a private view.'

'Dear John,' said Eugene reproachfully, 'do not jest about what is sacred to my cousin Rose and me.'

Dear John showed his white teeth in what was to me a most provoking smile.

'Sacred, did you say? Oh, then, it is a scriptural tableau, and, no doubt, intended for the benefit of any Sunday School children who may be at the penny readings. Let me see if I can guess the subject!

Jacob kissing his cousin Rachel before lifting up his voice to weep? Now, I don't think that is a bad guess for a child who doesn't go to Sunday School.'

There were times when Eugene looked his father's son, and he looked that now.

'Miss Plunkett,' he said with dignity, 'allow me to present Mr. Westropp.'

I bent with real ceremony, and Mr. Westropp bowed with a ceremony that I indignantly suspected was mock.

'Ah, John Westropp,' said Uncle Pepper, appearing on the scene, 'I am glad you are in time for tea. Of course, you have been introduced to Rosamund Smith Plunkett. She is a little smarter than she was the other day, eh, John? Do you think French feathers improve Irish birds, or do you agree with the poet about beauty unadorned?'

'It would be scarcely possible to give an opinion without knowing what the poet calls beauty,' said John Westropp, with another irritating smile.

Was the pang of disappointment I felt at that moment caused by the ugly middle-aged man's evident doubt of the beauty in which Eugene so firmly believed, or by the failure of my Paris gown to impress him with a sense of my womanly dignity?

The tea gong sounded, and Eugene approached me.

'Not so fast, my lad,' said John Westropp, laying an arresting hand on the velvet-sleeved arm.

What a contrast these two presented as they stood for a moment side by side under the crystal gasalier!

Beautiful young Eugene Smith, in his picturesque

coat of velvet and his artistic neckcloth of pale blue silk, in which a diamond glittered like a dewdrop.

Ugly middle-aged John Westropp, clothed in prosaic dark cloth, relieved only by linen white and clean.

‘Friend Smith,’ said the same John, addressing Uncle Pepper, ‘are we not agreed that, before all things, it is necessary to set an example of good manners to the young, and is it not good manners for the guest of the evening to arm the lady of the house to the dining-room?’

Uncle Pepper shook his forefinger in a way that showed he was in the mood for harmless pleasantry.

‘John Westropp,’ he said, ‘you are not the guest of the evening. You are only the man that minds the shop. Ah, I must let you into our little joke. Let the young people go on together, and take my arm.’

Then the highly-diverting story of my shop and warehouse confusion was told literally behind my back.

‘Why don’t you laugh, John?’ asked Uncle Pepper at the dining-room door.

‘Because,’ said John, ‘I am more ready to weep. The ignorance of the young is no laughing matter.’

How could the wretch persist in his offensive allusions to my youth while the long train of my Paris gown swept the ground at his feet?

‘So, John, you are going to read Dickens again?’ said Uncle Pepper when the fish was removed from before him. ‘I am often surprised that a good elocutionist like you does not aim at something higher. Boiled fowl or roast beef, John?’

‘I am content with Dickens,’ said John, ‘and I will trouble you for beef.’

‘Dickens is a vastly over-rated man,’ said Uncle Pepper, beginning to carve the beef. ‘I have read a certain number of novels, not as a matter of pleasure, but as a matter of principle. Fiction does not commend itself to me, but an Englishman in my position is bound to make himself acquainted with the various forms of English literature. I was informed that *Pickwick* was Charles Dickens’s most amusing book, so I made it my business to read *Pickwick*, but I was not amused.’

‘It is possible,’ said John Westropp, smiling down on his beef, ‘that Samuel Weller might be a different sort of fellow if he were made a business of. I never took him in that way myself, so I don’t know.’

‘*Pickwick* might be fairly readable,’ said Uncle Pepper, putting horse-radish on his own plate, ‘if Samuel Weller expressed himself in better English, but the jokes of the lower orders are never entirely agreeable to me.’

‘And I,’ said Eugene, ‘am infinitely more amused by the delicately fine humour of Disraeli.’

‘Disraeli’s wit is so fine that I always lose sight of the point,’ said John Westropp.

‘Disraeli’s wit is food for the immortal gods,’ said Eugene, taking a spoonful of honey.

‘That’s why it don’t satisfy some mortal men,’ said John Westropp, who seemed to enjoy his beef. ‘When I try to make a meal of Disraeli, I feel like the Yankee at the boarding-house who wanted a microscope to see the meat.’

‘I was surprised to hear that comic novelists were

received into such good society,' said Uncle Pepper. 'The Dean of St. Winnifred told me the other day that he once sat next to Charles Dickens at a London dinner party.'

'What a proud moment in his life!' said John Westropp.

'Right, John,' said Uncle Pepper approvingly. 'It must have been the proudest of all moments in the comic novelist's life when he sat down to meat with a dignitary of the Church.'

'Oh, I didn't mean it that way,' said John as he sent up his plate for more beef. 'I meant a proud moment for the Dean.'

'Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper, 'have you discovered that John Westropp is a sarcastic man?'

'Yes,' I said, trying to answer the question with womanly ease even while I reddened like a silly school-girl, as I felt conscious that the brown eyes towards which I would not look were looking my way. 'Yes, I think he is sarcastic in a general way, but I don't think there was any sarcasm in his last remark. I believe he really thinks Dickens greater than a dean.'

'Remarkable discernment of the youthful mind,' murmured the brown-eyed one in a voice nearly as soft as Eugene's own.

'Rose,' said Eugene, 'do you not think the works of Disraeli more beautiful than the works of Dickens?'

Uncle Pepper had turned his eyeglass full on me, and I felt that Eugene's question was put not so much to me as between me and some reproving comment on my late speech.

'I have not read either,' I answered.

'Of course not,' said the irritating John Westropp. 'Boarding-school young ladies are very properly forbidden to read novels. My good Eugene, if you want to draw out Miss Plunkett's best conversational powers ask her to make a comparison between Alexander the Great going out to conquer worlds and Alfred the Great staying at home to burn buns.'

'A very wise suggestion,' said Uncle Pepper, dropping his eyeglass with a relenting smile. 'Historical discussions are most instructive. I will speak to the Vicar about getting up a high-class mutual improvement society next winter instead of the present frivolous form of parish entertainment. Rosamund, it is time for you to put on your hat.'

CHAPTER IX

'POOR LITTLE ROSEY'

IF there were any working clothes at the penny readings I did not see them. The penny seats were on forms in the background of the parochial schoolroom, which was the scene of the entertainment, and I sat between Uncle Pepper and the Vicar's wife in the front row of the sixpenny chairs.

The room was crowded when we arrived, but none except the Vicar's wife had presumed to appropriate a seat in that front row to which Pepper Smith of Bryn Hall advanced with the calm dignity of one who would not condescend to any doubt of finding the best places at his disposal.

The room was so crowded that most of the young men had only standing room, and there was a great show of cropped heads against supporting walls.

All the unemployed sons of gentility were there, together with those mercantile youths who were rich enough to make light of extra train fares, or lucky enough to be in the employment of fathers who were indulgent about extra holidays.

Some of these young men were there to encourage the efforts of their own or other—especially other—sisters. Some were themselves performers.

The Vicar was in the chair, and opened the proceedings with a little speech, full of the little clerical jokes that go so far with an orthodox audience.

'The Vicar makes an admirable chairman,' said Uncle Pepper to the Vicar's wife.

'I suppose so,' said she with her wholesome smile; 'but I admire him more when he is not a chairman.'

The first performance, a duet sung by a pretty girl with a poor soprano, and an ugly girl with a rich contralto, was well received by the crop-headed young men, on whose demonstrations the entertainment chiefly depended for applause.

Then the junior curate, still in the early days of deacon's orders, with burning blushes on his smooth young face, and *The Lady of the Lake* in his nervous hand, mounted the platform, and at the end of an indistinct and inaudible reading, was understood to inform the audience that *he* was 'Roderick Dhu.' Which information was received with such comments as 'You did well to mention it,' and 'Proud to know you,' by the young laymen, under cover of the loud applause, that I hoped the young clergyman would not think ironical.

Then arose a young man who, in a very decided Liverpool accent, delivered himself of a selection from *Handy Andy*.

'Capital,' said Uncle Pepper, who had satisfactory business dealings with that young man's firm. 'There's a bit of Irish for you, Rosamund.'

'It is not Irish,' I exclaimed, unable to suppress my scorn of the Lancashire lad's idea of my beloved brogue.

'Then pray what is it?' asked Uncle Pepper, raising his eyeglass.

'It may be Japanese,' I said in my haste. 'It may be anything I know nothing about, but it certainly is not Irish.'

'Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper, uplifting a reproving black kid glove, 'your exaggerated language is most unbecoming, and your excited manner is most unladylike.'

I felt chilled as a snub from Uncle Pepper alone could chill me, but the Vicar's wife squeezed my hand with a sympathy that warmed my heart again.

'I have been in Ireland, and I know,' she whispered.

The next performer was Eugene, who, bowing his fair head to the company, sat down to the piano and interpreted Mozart to such as had ears to hear.

When he played his last chord he retired with another bow amid very faint applause.

The young men with cropped heads had little love for Mozart, and less for Eugene.

I feared my sensitive cousin would be hurt by their want of sympathy, but he was not.

Eugene knew that his playing was beautiful, and he played for the love of Mozart, seeking not the praise of crop-headed young men.

The silent tribute of a maiden's flushing cheek, or a matron's tearful eye, was more to him than the loudest of hand-claps.

There was much noisy approval when a plain

middle-aged man faced the audience with 'The Story of Little Dombey' in his hand.

The crop-headed young men admired Dickens and liked John Westropp.

All ye who love Dickens imagine, as I cannot describe, what it was for me to listen for the first time to the story of little Dombey read with strong dramatic power and tender sympathy. I have since read that story over and over again, and heard it read by many celebrated readers. But never was my soul stirred so deeply as when I first heard it read by John Westropp at the Llandhul penny readings.

'Tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!'

The reader's voice was strangely sweet as he closed the book, and the reader's eyes shone with a strangely soft light through the mist that rose before mine.

Surely this man who had seemed so disagreeable to me only a short hour or two ago must love little children—this man whose voice was soft with tender sympathy for sickly childhood, and who seemed to watch little Paul floating down the river of death with eyes that reflected the light on the radiant head of Childhood's King.

I do not remember any of the readings or songs that followed. They were all more or less unmeaning sounds outside the sanctuary where the spirit of my own childhood was holding converse with little Paul.

At ten o'clock the entertainment was brought to

a close by a vote of thanks to the performers, and the vicar's benediction to the assembly.

As usual on such occasions, the leaders of Llandhul society lingered behind the departing lower classes to congratulate the friends who had distinguished themselves on the platform, and to exchange civilities with the acquaintances whose chairs had been too distant for earlier converse. Some of the crop-headed young men were introduced to me by the female relatives with whom I was already acquainted, while I stayed close by the side of the Vicar's wife.

'I say, Aunt Bill,' said a voice in that dear woman's ear. Her Christian name was Wilhelmina, abbreviated into Bill by the irreverent son of Arch-deacon Goodman's old age, who was also the son of her own dead sister. He was a long, lean, weak-eyed, snub-nosed youth, who was not greatly admired by any man but his doting father, nor greatly indulged by any woman but his charitable aunt.

'Well, what do you say?' she asked, turning her kind gray eyes on him.

'What doth hinder us to have a dance?'

'A dance,' echoed the Vicar's wife. 'When? Where?'

'Now, here.'

'Oh, Phil,' cried his aunt, 'what has put such an idea into your head?'

'Lots of things,' said Phil. 'The piano, the floor, the fair women, and the brave men. I say, Aunt Bill, give the word, and I'll have every blessed chair and form cleared away, and every blessed old woman sitting against the wall in two minutes.'

'Nonsense, Phil,' said the Vicar's wife. 'No one can give the word but the Vicar, and he will never allow the schoolroom to be turned into a ballroom. Why, you dreadful boy, don't you know the Sunday School is held in this room?'

'This ain't Sunday,' said Phil, 'and the Vic. will do whatever you ask him.'

'I am not going to ask him to do anything that would make a scandal,' said the Vicar's wife decidedly.

'Ain't it just as scandalous to sing comic songs on the platform as to dance on the floor?' queried Phil. 'And you needn't say you have any prejudice against dancing, Aunt Bill, because you haven't, you know. I met an old Yorkshire chap in Liverpool the other day, and he told me he often went fifty miles on the chance of getting a waltz with you.'

'That old chap and I were younger then,' laughed the Vicar's wife, 'and this is not Yorkshire. Besides, it is not a question of my prejudices, but of the Vicar's objection to the criticism of Dissenters.'

'Oh, conf——'

'Phil!'

'Now, you needn't Phil me in that clerical tone of voice. It don't suit your cast of countenance. I suppose you thought I was going to confound the Dissenters, but I wasn't. I was merely going to advise you to confine the Dissenters to their own meetings. Now then, Aunt Bill, if you are afraid of the Vic., I ain't.'

The Vicar was at some little distance talking to Uncle Pepper, and Phil advanced towards his elders

in his own free-and-easy way. Most of the crop-headed youths were in some awe of the sternly-handsome soldierly cleric, at whose hands many of them had received wholesome correction at the Lancashire school, where he was once head-master. Phil Goodman had never been to that school, and there was no room on his small head for the bump of veneration. The Vicar of Llandhul was only 'Aunt Bill's old man' to him.

'Come and see how the Vicar takes it,' said the Vicar's wife, taking my arm. 'I think it would be lovely for you young things to have a dance if it could only be kept from the Dissenters; but they made such a fuss last year when I had supper and round games at the Vicarage for all comers after the harvest festival. I didn't think a jolly harvest home feeling after a thanksgiving service could hurt anybody, but the Dissenters did. One of the preachers took for his next Sunday's text —"The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." I didn't mind being preached into an idolatrous Israelite, but the Vicar did.'

We were now beside the Vicar and Uncle Pepper, where Phil Goodman was waiting, with hands in pockets, for an opportunity of putting in his word.

Uncle Pepper had delivered himself of an edifying remark on the out-door relief system when Phil spoke.

'I say, Vic., Aunt Bill wants to wind up this instructive and amusing evening with a little dance, but she says you won't have it because you are too awfully frightened of the Dissenters.'

The colour deepened in the Vicar's clean-shaven

cheeks. Dissent was the only thorn in his otherwise comfortable flesh.

Uncle Pepper raised his eyeglass, and regarded the disturbed clerical countenance with a smile.

'And pray,' said he, 'why should the Vicar of Llandhul be frightened of Dissenters?'

'That's just what I want to know,' said Phil.

'Hold your tongue, Philip Goodman,' snapped the Vicar. 'Who cares what you want to know, or what any other young jackanapes like you wants to do?' (Here he glared at a quickly-gathered congregation of cropped heads.) 'Now, Mr. Smith, I appeal to you as the Cæsar of this occasion. Is a parochial schoolroom a seemly place for a dance?'

All eyes were turned on Uncle Pepper—young eyes anxiously, old eyes curiously.

Uncle Pepper gazed at the assembly with the complacency of a Cæsar who felt the Imperial purple becoming.

'Bless the old boy, ain't he enjoying himself,' I heard one of the crop-headed youths say in what he meant for an undertone to a girl in a state of suppressed giggle.

'A parochial schoolroom,' said Uncle Pepper, at last delivering judgment, 'a parochial schoolroom is not a seemly place for a dance, regarded as a dance, but a parochial schoolroom is a seemly place for a dance regarded as a protest of the Church against the criticism of dissent. Therefore, my dear Vicar, as you do me the honour of leaving the decision to me, I decide for the dance.'

'Three cheers for Cæsar!' cried Phil Goodman.

‘Philip,’ said the Vicar sharply, ‘I’ll turn you out if you can’t behave like a gentleman.’

‘And a Christian,’ said the irrepressible Phil. ‘All right, Vic.’

The Vicar turned a contemptuous back on Phil and an affable face to his crop-headed associates.

‘Now, boys,’ he said, ‘this dance is a protest, not a precedent. I’ll not have any more of that sort of thing after to-night, so you may make the most of it. Clear the room and choose your partners. I say, you fellows,’ wheeling round on his two curates, ‘you are not to dance. I can’t have that, you know. You must protest against dissent in other ways.’

The senior curate, who was stout and flat-footed, smiled cheerfully. The junior curate, who had a slim figure and a high instep, sighed submissively.

The crop-headed youths were busily clearing away chairs and forms, and the curly-haired Eugene was dreamily watching them when the end of a form was accidentally or otherwise dropped on his toes.

‘Oh, *how* you have hurt me!’ he moaned as he limped away with a flush of pain on his cherub face.

‘Ain’t he a jolly jackass?’ said the young man who had dropped the form.

‘Ass enough,’ said a grinning neighbour, ‘but too jolly girlish for a Jack of any kind. Why the dickens didn’t his governor send him to school with other fellows, and give him the chance of getting licked into a man?’

My heart was hot within me. I was angry with those horrid young men for making game of Eugene in their coarse slang, and still more angry with Eugene for giving them sport.

Eugene was beautiful, but why, oh, why did he cry like a girl when he was hurt?

Like a girl indeed! If that form had fallen on my toes I would have scorned to lift up a complaining voice.

I was so deep in vexed thought that I was only vaguely conscious that some one beside me was saying something about a dance.

'With pleasure,' I said, mechanically repeating the conventional phrase I had learned from the Thornville dancing-master.

'I beg your pardon,' said the same voice, which I now knew belonged to Mr. John Westropp.

'With pleasure,' I repeated, raising my voice as if the middle-aged man were deaf.

The brown eyes sparkled, and the white teeth gleamed.

'I am very stupid,' said the voice that had sounded so softly sweet at little Dombey's death-bed; 'but I don't quite understand you.'

How could I ever have thought these irritating brown eyes soothing?

'I said "with pleasure," Mr. Westropp. Isn't that the right thing for a girl to say when a gentleman asks her to dance?'

'Quite right, but may I ask what gentleman has asked a girl to dance?'

Oh, those teasing brown eyes! How could any one call them beautiful?

'You asked me to dance with you,' I said, feeling disgustingly young.

'Pardon me,' murmured the soft voice, 'I did not ask you to dance. I merely asked you if you

thought this was a seemly place for a dance. However, as you are so complimentary as to say you will have pleasure in dancing with me, I can only assure you that the pleasure will be mutual.'

I felt as ready to cry as Eugene had looked when the form fell on his toes, but the Thornville habit of self-control was still strong enough to hold my emotion in check, though I spoke in a way that was contrary to all the Thornville traditions of politeness.

'I don't want to dance with you, and I won't.'

'Oh yes, you do, because you said it would be a pleasure to you, and you will, because I say it will be a pleasure to me.'

There was so much decision in the soft voice, and the Thornville habit of obedience to elders was still so strong, that in spite of inward rebellion I took his arm with outward submission.

The Vicar's wife played a set of Irish quadrilles in a style very different from the Liverpool young man's interpretation of *Handy Andy*, and though I had told Mr. Westropp that I did not want to dance with him, I found myself enjoying this dance more than I had ever enjoyed a dance at Thornville.

Perhaps it was because I had hitherto only danced with other girls, and because a man, even if he is ugly and irritating, is a better partner than another girl.

'You must waltz with me by and by,' said Mr. Westropp at the end of the quadrille. 'I really waltz pretty well for my age when Eugene plays.'

I had dignified thoughts about refusing to dance with him again, but as I could not at that moment

put them into dignified words, I promised to waltz, though I did not say I would do so with pleasure.

My next partner was a crop-headed young man, who galloped me out of breath, after which Eugene led me through a set of Lancers with the gentle grace of an old-world courtier in a minuet.

Then John Westropp claimed me for the waltz, and Eugene sat down to play.

Was it John Westropp's exceptional waltzing or Eugene Smith's exceptional playing that made that waltz an ideal dance?

'You seem to waltz with pleasure,' said my partner in one of the pauses.

'Waltzing is always pleasant,' I said, taking some little credit to myself for not encouraging him to think I found any special pleasure in waltzing with him.

Some time before this the Vicar's wife had called her nephew Philip to her side, and given some commission evidently agreeable to the young man, who at once disappeared from the scene.

Now he appeared again, bearing a large tray of cakes and sandwiches, accompanied by two of the Vicarage servants, laden with cups and saucers. The resident schoolmistress had plenty of boiling water on her kitchen fire, and soon the mingled odours of tea and coffee were gratefully sniffed by young dancers who were beginning to feel thirsty, and old lookers-on who were beginning to feel chilly.

The Vicar's wife might not be spiritually minded, but she was conveniently thoughtful for the bodily comfort of her neighbours.

When Phil Goodman approached me with a plate

of sandwiches in his right hand and a plate of cakes in his left, I stretched forth my hand towards the sandwiches, because I was ashamed to show a childish preference for cake.

Like the other girls, I had removed my hat and jacket when the dancing began, keeping on my gloves, which, unlike the other girls, I forgot to take off when the refreshments came in.

Mr. Philip Goodman had his own idea of a sandwich, and when he was monarch of all the ham and butter surveyed that night in the Vicarage larder, that idea was royally carried out.

The monster sandwich to which I now helped myself was so appalling that I hastily broke it in two, forgetful for the moment of the dainty light gloves so carefully selected by Eugene.

The next moment I had laid the parted sandwich down on the form beside me, and was disgustedly contemplating my greasy kid fingers.

‘They were such a lovely cream ; wasn’t it rather a pity to make butter of them so soon ?’

The same voice spoke that had irritated me so often that evening, and John Westropp made as if he would have applied a spotless handkerchief to my buttered hands.

‘Don’t,’ I said angrily.

‘Well, I won’t,’ he said amiably, ‘but little girls ought not to show naughty temper when their elders are kind to them.’

‘You are not kind to me,’ I said, violently pulling off my buttered gloves ; ‘you have been very unkind to me all the evening.’

‘Have I ? I did not mean it. I would not

be unkind to you for the world. Poor little Rosey!'

The voice sounded as strangely sweet as at little Dombey's death-bed, and there was a wondrous softness in the brown eyes that met mine as I suddenly looked up into John Westropp's face.

'Why do you call me Rosey?' I asked.

It was my turn now to put to confusion this middle-aged man who had so often confused me that evening.

'I beg your pardon,' he said stammeringly, 'I thought it was your name.'

'My name is Rosamund,' I said, rising into dignity as my mighty tormentor appeared to be falling, 'but no one has called me Rosey since I was a child.'

'That must be a very long time ago.'

I was unpleasantly assured by the tone of his voice that the tormentor was recovering his balance.

'It is ten years since any one called me Rosey,' I said, with a grand show of making light of a decade. 'I was called Rosamund at school, and something else in another place'—(I would not for worlds have told him that 'missy' was that something else)—'but scarcely any one has called me Rosey since I was on the ship.'

'And do you really remember the *Conqueror*?' asked John Westropp, looking curiously at me.

'How do you know she was called the *Conqueror*?' I asked, with curiosity in my own voice.

'Didn't you say the *Conqueror*?'

The questioner's eyes were not now on my face, but on his own feet, which I now remarked were shapely and well shod.

'No,' I said, 'I only spoke of her as a ship.'

He raised his eyes and looked at me again with a little smile.

'Don't you think it was very clever of me to guess her name?'

'Not at all,' I said, suddenly struck with an enlightening thought. 'You must have seen my advertisement in the Liverpool paper.'

'Yes, I saw it. Now, as far as you have gone, do you think you have done well to exchange Ireland for Wales?'

'Oh yes,' I said decidedly. 'I was unhappy there, and I have so much to make me happy here.'

'I am glad,' and he really looked so.

'Why are you glad?' I asked, preparing myself for an irritating assurance to the effect that the welfare of young people was always interesting to their benevolent elders.

But John Westropp made no such reply.

'Because,' he said, 'it was I who drew Pepper Smith's attention to the advertisement that might otherwise have escaped his notice, and I feel in a sort of a way responsible for the change in your life's course. God speed you all the way, my child.'

I wondered how that kindly voice could ever have irritated me, or how I could ever have thought the face ugly in which such wonderfully soft brown eyes were set.

Eugene, who had been chivalrously serving the most ancient of maids with coffee, now made his way to my side, and about the same moment Mr. Westropp's attention was claimed by the Vicar.

'Dear Rose,' murmured Eugene, as he gazed with

disgust on my divided and untasted sandwich, 'I am so glad you have not eaten that shocking thing. Come home and let us eat a delicately delicious supper of milk and sponge cake.'

The carriage had brought four people to the parochial schoolroom, but it only brought three back to Bryn Hall.

'Do you return with us, John Westropp?' asked Uncle Pepper as he took his place beside me.

'Thanks, no,' said Mr. Westropp from the pavement. 'The Vicar wants me to go home with him and talk out a little business matter, and he is coming up to Manchester with me by the early morning train.'

'Very good,' said Uncle Pepper, with a farewell wave of his black-gloved hand.

Of course it was very good, but I thought it might be still better if the seat opposite to me were occupied by the ugly man whose beautiful eyes had looked so tenderly soft as he said, 'Poor little Rosey!'

CHAPTER X

‘WANTED—A COMPANION’

‘I HAVE been thoughtless,’ said Uncle Pepper next morning at breakfast.

I felt as much surprised as if an Archbishop had accused himself of heresy or a Lord Chief Justice had charged himself with folly.

‘Thoughtless,’ echoed Eugene, lifting his delicate eyebrows in smiling deprecation, ‘*you* thoughtless. Oh, dear papa!’

‘Thoughtless,’ replied Uncle Pepper, apparently not displeased by our scepticism. ‘I assure you, my dear children, I am not infallible, and I hold the concealment of small failings to be unworthy of great minds. When I was a young man, working for a small salary, my employer on one occasion paid me a ten instead of a five-pound note. I carelessly put it into my pocket without looking at it closely, and it was only when I reached home that I discovered the mistake. I at once set off to my employer’s house and returned him the note.’

‘What beautiful integrity!’ murmured Eugene. I, seeing nothing remarkably beautiful in an act of common honesty, made no remark.

'So my employer thought,' said Uncle Pepper, smiling on his son. "'Young man," said he, as he exchanged the ten-pound note for a five, "your principle deserves praise." "Sir," I answered, "my carelessness deserves reproof." Now,' said Uncle Pepper, waving his fish fork, 'some young men would have been too much elated by an employer's praise to stoop to the humiliating admission I then made, but I would have scorned myself if my employer's admiration of my principle had tempted me to withhold my own admission of carelessness. And now,' continued Uncle Pepper, helping himself to sardines, 'some men might plume themselves on providing a penniless young kinswoman with a luxurious home, while I am not ashamed to confess that I have been thoughtless in not providing that young kinswoman with a companion.'

'Dear papa,' exclaimed Eugene in injured surprise, 'am not I a companion for my cousin Rose?'

'Dear boy,' said his smiling parent, 'it is because you are such a good companion that I think it necessary for Rosamund to have another. Pray, Rosamund, have you ever heard of such a thing as a chaperon?'

'I have read of them in story-books,' I said.

'Very good,' said Uncle Pepper. 'Now, tell me what you think Miss Thorn would do in the case of a young lady practising songs with a young gentleman in her drawing-room if she could not be present?'

'She would send a governess to sit in the room,' I answered promptly; 'at least, that is what she used to do when our old singing-master was ill one

winter, and his son gave the lessons. The son was not very young,' I added, wishing to be quite accurate,—'that is,' I hurried on as I began to feel the confusing effect of Uncle Pepper's eyeglass, 'he was much older than any of the girls, but of course he was younger than his father.'

'Well,' said Uncle Pepper, dropping his eyeglass with a smile, 'considering the remarkable fact that my son is younger than I am, I must provide a governess to sit in the room while you pursue your musical studies with him in my absence.'

'Governess!' I exclaimed in school-girlish horror of that institution.

'I was not speaking quite literally,' said Uncle Pepper, with a smile of contemptuous compassion for my density. 'Had *you* given your entire attention to the conversation, Rosamund, you must have seen the humorous turn *I* have given it.'

'I see your meaning, dear papa,' said Eugene; 'but pardon me if I fail to see the necessity for the supervision you desire. May not my cousin Rose and I be permitted the freedom of brotherly and sisterly intercourse? Rose is to me as a sister, and I am as a brother to her. Is it not so, Rose?'

'Oh yes,' I said, touched to the heart by his pleading eyes, 'I feel as if you were my brother, Eugene.'

'But he is not your brother,' said Uncle Pepper, looking at me with the displeasure that never rested on his son.

'But, papa,' said Eugene, evidently as puzzled as I was about the cause of his father's displeasure, 'is not the affection of brother and sister beautiful?'

'Very,' said Uncle Pepper, answering his son with his lips, but turning the full displeasure of his eyes on me. 'Far too beautiful to be grown in a fortnight. Some sentiments are of quick growth, but not brotherly and sisterly sentiment. Prayers.'

Eugene rang the bell for the servants, with a look at me in his bewildered blue eyes that seemed to ask, 'Why is dear papa displeased?' Which question I would if I could have answered in my old enemy Biddy's way, by making my own eyes ask, 'Why am I so often displeasing to your dear papa?'

'Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper after prayers, 'write out an advertisement for this,' tapping the *Liverpool Courier* with his eyeglass. 'It was through your advertisement in the *Courier* that our present arrangements were made—arrangements that will always be satisfactory, I *hope*,' said Uncle Pepper, with an emphasis on the hope that to my sensitive ear expressed his readiness to meet disappointment.

Writing materials were at once supplied by the ever-attentive Eugene, and I sat down to my appointed task with all the cheerfulness of a gratefully-disposed poor relation doubtful about the possibility of giving satisfaction to a generous benefactor.

'Wanted,' dictated Uncle Pepper from the hearthrug, 'wanted, a companion for a young lady in a refined Christian household. Must be of highly respectable birth, thoroughly accustomed to good society, of cultivated manners, mild but firm character, and a consistent member of the Church of England. The recommendation of a clergyman

will be esteemed. Address, Pepper Smith, Bryn Hall, Llandhul, North Wales.'

'Pepper Smith, Esquire?' I queried, staying my pen.

'No, Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper. There was decision but not displeasure in his tone, and to my relief I saw that his countenance was gracious. 'Your question is a very natural one, and as I am always willing to encourage the intelligent curiosity of the young, I will answer it fully. You already know the views I hold about the responsibility of my present position, and how earnestly I desire to make that position the stronghold of principle. Now, to-morrow morning this advertisement will be read by hundreds of men in far inferior positions, needy professional men and poor clerks who every day of their lives sacrifice sense to gentility. I can imagine such men exclaiming, "Here is Mr. Smith of Manchester—Mr. Smith of Bryn Hall—writing himself down plain Pepper Smith. How very absurd it is for us who have not a fiftieth part of Mr. Smith's income, nor a hundredth part of Mr. Smith's social distinction, to presume to the title of 'Esquire.'" Thus you see, my dear Rosamund, how an example of humility set by one in a position of influence may be the beginning of a great reformation in a world of genteel pretence.'

There were many replies to the advertisement, but only one found grace in Pepper Smith's sight.

It was written in a firm, heavy, upright hand that was as uncommon in those days as it is commonplace in these, and it disposed of its subject without waste of words.

SIR—As I have been a governess to young ladies since I left school five years ago, I may perhaps be considered eligible for the situation of young lady's companion. My father was a physician ; my mother was the daughter of a Dean, and I am accustomed to the society of my equals. As I cannot presume to offer any opinion about my own manners and character, I refer you to the Rev. Dr. Narrowby, my late employer, whose family I am now visiting, and who will be able to assure you of my orthodoxy.—I am, sir, yours faithfully,

HELEN BRATTON.

'I like this letter,' said Uncle Pepper, retaining it in his right hand. 'You may put the rest in the fire, Rosamund,' waving his left hand towards a crowd of others. 'This letter, my dear Rosamund, is a model. The writer is business-like, but lady-like, confident, yet modest. The daughter of a physician and the granddaughter of a Dean. Most excellent position. Now, there is a letter among that lot,' said Uncle Pepper, with a contemptuous glance at the burning ones, 'a crested letter from the daughter of a baronet who ruined himself in foreign gambling-houses, but I don't want that sort of thing. I am a Conservative, and I duly honour the English aristocracy, but I have a still higher regard for English respectability. I am a respectable English merchant, and I will have nothing but respectability under my roof. The daughter of a physician and the granddaughter of a church dignitary. Nothing could be better. And here is her reference. A clergyman whose name is a household word in Protestant England. The Rev. Dr. Narrowby, author of that most excellent book, *Scylla and Charybdis, or The Rocks of Ritualism*

a school-fellow of his eldest daughter some years ago, and had lately finished the education of his younger ones. She had also been an invaluable help in household matters during the long illness of the wife Dr. Narrowby had lost a few months ago. Dr. Narrowby's health having been affected by his sorrow, and his alarm having been excited by the condition of his youngest daughter's lungs, he had arranged to take a Continental chaplaincy for a year, and was now preparing for the change of duty. He would have invited Miss Bratton to accompany his family, but the young people had not met this proposal as heartily as he had expected them to do. Young people as a rule had an unreasonable objection to the company of a governess when school days were over, and his girls were no exception to this rule, though in his opinion Miss Bratton was an exceptional governess.

Dr. Narrowby had also to make the mournful confession that, like many other clergymen's daughters, his own were not deeply interested in things clerical. He was afraid they would derive more pleasure from a philharmonic concert than a church congress, and he had reason to believe that they preferred the novels of Anthony Trollope to the sermons of Jeremy Taylor.

Dr. Narrowby supposed with a gentle sigh that such a disposition was natural to young people, and he admitted with a gentle smile that it was unreasonable to expect young people to be supernatural.

His girls had never shown any special interest in his own particular literary line, but Miss Bratton's untiring patience in collecting materials for his

and I were at the door of Dr. Narrowby's Liverpool parsonage.

A severely respectable old woman-servant in a lilac cotton gown and a white frilled cap informed us that Miss Bratton was out with the young ladies, but that Dr. Narrowby was in his study, where, if we pleased, we would find him.

'Now, Rosamund,' said Uncle Pepper as we followed the lead of the lilac gown, 'you are going into the presence of a champion of Christendom and a pillar of Protestantism.'

He had lowered his voice somewhat, but not sufficiently to prevent his words reaching the ears under the white frills, and the severely respectable face turned to him with intensely respectful approval at the study door.

I followed Uncle Pepper nervously.

Champions, I supposed, were always fierce and fiery, and pillars, I knew, were generally hard and high.

I was therefore as much surprised as relieved by my first sight of this Christian champion and Protestant pillar.

Dr. Narrowby was a very small, soft-skinned man, with childish blue eyes and nervously courteous manners.

He regretted Miss Bratton's absence, which would be rather a long one, as she had taken his daughters to the organ performance at St. George's Hall, and he was further regretful of a pressing parochial engagement that would prevent his entertaining us till her return. He was sure that Mr. Smith would be fully satisfied with Miss Bratton. She had been

CHAPTER XI

THE COMING OF HELEN

It was convenient for Miss Bratton to come into residence at Bryn Hall on the following Saturday.

John Westropp, down from Manchester that same day on a business mission to Pepper Smith, was invited to stay over Sunday, an invitation for which his accompanying portmanteau proved him fully prepared.

At half-past five o'clock Uncle Pepper walked across to the station to meet the Liverpool train, charging me to watch by a drawing-room window for his return, and to welcome my new companion in the hall.

John Westropp stood beside me as I kept my twilight vigil, while Eugene, by the blazing fire, was absorbed in the study of an old Gregorian chant-book, lent him by the junior curate, who sympathised with his horror of Anglican music.

'How does the young lady like the idea of the young lady's companion?' asked Mr. Westropp.

'Not at all,' I answered, letting escape a sentiment strengthened by repression. 'I am afraid,' I went on, with a sudden yearning after the latent

sympathy of the teasing brown eyes, 'I am afraid this Miss Bratton is a person I did not like when I was much younger.'

'Oh, indeed. Some school-fellow of whose superior beauty you were naughtily envious?'

'No,' I said, already repentful of my hasty confidence; 'the Helen Bratton I mean was not my school-fellow, and was not beautiful. She had red hair and freckles.'

'Poor Helen! Then she must have naughtily envied your superior beauty, and made herself unpleasant accordingly.'

The brown eyes were laughing now, and I felt indignantly conscious that my own eyes were struggling against something that was not laughter.

'The question of beauty did not occur to me in those days. I did not know——' here I hastily broke off my sentence with a face on fire.

'You did not know its market value or the amount of your own stock-in-trade,' said my smiling tormentor.

At that moment, to my intense relief, I spied two figures at the gate I had been set to watch, and I essayed, like the heroine of romance, to 'sweep haughtily from the room.'

But before I could accomplish this dignified retreat from the scene of torture, John Westropp had swiftly stepped to the drawing-room door, and opened it.

'Poor little Rosey,' he whispered as I passed into the hall, 'I was a brute to tease her.'

And I went out of his presence with the spell of little Dombey on me once more.

'Miss Bratton,' said the master of the house as he led in a black-robed figure nearly his own height, 'here is Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett waiting to receive you. Rosamund, conduct Miss Bratton to her room.'

The hall gas was not yet lit, and I could not see the tall woman's thickly-veiled face. Perhaps by the dim light my new companion did not see the hand I timidly held out, as she did not extend her own, but slightly bowed and silently followed me upstairs. There was a bright fire in her room that made it very light, but as she did not raise her thick veil, I could not satisfy my curiosity about her hair and complexion.

'Leave that alone, please,' she said as I was about to light the gas. 'Is there not a servant to do it?'

These, her first words, rang out with a familiar sharpness, and my heart sank as I stayed my hand.

'Yes,' I answered nervously, 'but I thought you might like it lit at once.'

'I like servants' work to be done by servants,' she said, moving nearer to the fire. 'When will my luggage be here? and what is the dinner hour?'

'Your luggage will be here in a few minutes,' I answered, 'but we have no late dinner.'

Miss Bratton shrugged her broad shoulders with the peculiar grace of an Englishwoman executing a French movement.

'Tea will be ready at seven. It is a high tea.'

I gave this last bit of information partly because I resented the contempt for early dinners implied by the shrug, and partly because I sympathised

with a hungry traveller appalled by the prospect of a dinnerless evening.

'I am glad of that,' she said, sinking into an arm-chair by the fire. 'I lunched early, and calculated on the usual order of things in a country gentleman's house. Perhaps I shall be out of my reckoning again if I expect a maid to help me into my evening dress.'

I silently wondered if Miss Bratton had been accustomed to the services of a lady's-maid at her late many-daughtered clerical employer's, while I said aloud—

'Morgan, the housemaid who dresses me, is busy just now; but I will do anything you want done for you.'

'My dear,' said the sharp voice, pronouncing the two words in the conventional governess tone, 'I only want you to leave me in peace for the next hour.'

And I by no means unwillingly left her.

In the drawing-room I found old Colonel Gunn, who was expected for tea and chess with Uncle Pepper at least once a week. The old soldier was, as usual, full of harmless gossip about his neighbours of the semi-detached villas, and my thoughts were diverted from my new companion till she appeared in the room a quarter of an hour before tea-time. As she moved slowly across the room, I thought she was the tallest, the whitest, and the coldest woman I had ever seen. The extreme length of her black velvet skirt—it was only velveteen, but I did not then know the difference—added to the majestic effect of her great height; the black net that

covered but did not hide her neck and arms made the contrasting skin dazzling in its whiteness, while the warmth of her red hair intensified the coldness of her colourless face. Uncle Pepper advanced to meet her with a look of satisfaction that had never yet rested on me. As he afterwards said, he admired 'a woman with a presence.'

Eugene, whose countenance I could now read like an open book, was impressed by Miss Bratton's general appearance, but not altogether happy about the combination of red hair and amber upholstery. Colonel Gunn exhibited all the agreeable wrinkles that an introduction to any woman under thirty always gathered round his ancient eyes.

John Westropp's expression I could not see, because I carefully kept my eyes away from his face. He and Eugene stood near me, while Uncle Pepper and Colonel Gunn engaged the attention of Miss Bratton.

'I am not sure that her face is in the least beautiful,' murmured Eugene. 'I could wish for less vivid hair-colouring, and less pallid flesh-tint, but her figure is deliciously dignified.'

'She wears a nice black dress,' said John Westropp.

I had been quite unmoved by Eugene's admiration of Miss Bratton's figure, but I was moved in a strangely unpleasant way by Mr. Westropp's approval of her dress.

'Well, is it your long-lost Helen?' asked Mr. Westropp as Eugene moved nearer Miss Bratton's chair.

'Yes,' I said decidedly, 'it is the same Helen Bratton.'

'Are you really sure? Her hair is what the ill-natured and inartistic would call red, but where are the freckles?'

This question I had asked myself more than once during the last five minutes, and I now gave the answer of my mind.

'I don't know what she has done with them, but I suppose there is some cure for a bad complexion.'

'I suppose so. But I did not suppose a nice little girl could make such a nasty little speech.'

I turned away quickly from him, and drew near the fireside group, scorning myself for feeling such an utterly wretched girl because an ugly middle-aged man had called another girl's dress nice and my speech nasty.

'The name of Bratton is familiar to me,' Colonel Gunn was saying as I approached. 'I might say painfully familiar, because it was the name of the surgeon of whom I suffered many things in my fighting days, but by Jove! I won't, because he was an uncommonly pleasant fellow when he wasn't on duty. Poor Joe Bratton! I was sorry to see his death in a Liverpool paper four or five years ago. Any relation of yours, Miss Bratton?'

'Only my father,' she answered in a low, grave voice.

'Oh, ah—I beg your pardon,' stammered the old soldier, while his smiling crow's-feet gave way to puzzled furrows. 'But I never knew Joe Bratton was a married man. However, it is nearly twenty years since I saw him, and, of course'—here the smiling crow's-feet reappeared and the ancient eyes seemed to express the gallant opinion that she on

AND THE FIRST THAT HE HEARD OF THE RE-ENTRY WAS

HE WAS WAITING FOR HIMSELF. AND IN THE
MOMENT THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO GO HE SAW
THE NEW COMER. HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE
AND THE SAME COMPLEXION.

HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE AND THE SAME
COMPLEXION. HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE
AND THE SAME COMPLEXION.

HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE AND THE SAME
COMPLEXION. HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE
AND THE SAME COMPLEXION.

HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE AND THE SAME
COMPLEXION. HE WAS A MAN OF THE SAME AGE
AND THE SAME COMPLEXION.

I SAW HER BROTHER LOOKING AT HIM WITH WHAT
I SUPPOSE WERE GRATEFUL EYES THOUGH I DID NOT THEN
KNOW THE SOURCE OF HER GRATITUDE. BUT HE WAS TOO
HAPPY TO BE GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS OF GLASS TO
LOOK AT HER. HE WAS STILL CONSIDERATIONALLY CLEARING
THE BORDER WHEN SHE TURNED WITH A CALM FACE TO
COUNSEL GOWN AND QUIETLY TOOK UP THE DROPPED
THREAD OF DISCOURSE.

'You naturally thought my father was unmarried.
I believe it was his sensitive feeling about my
mother's family that drove him into a regiment
ordered on foreign service with a secret that he was
proudly resolved to keep from his new associates.
My mother was the daughter of a Dean,' said Helen,

with what I then thought was a flush of pride. Then, turning towards Uncle Pepper, 'I need not remind *you*, Mr. Smith, of the great gulf sometimes fixed between deans and medical men.'

There was in her emphasis on the 'you' just the kind of subtle flattery most acceptable to Pepper Smith.

'Yes,' he said graciously, 'you are right, my dear Miss Bratton, in supposing that I am as thoroughly at home in clerical society as a layman can possibly be, and I have often playfully remonstrated with my neighbour, Archdeacon Goodman, on the pride of cathedral dignitaries. Oh, I can very well understand your good father's rebellion against the hauteur of your grandfather the Dean. Not that I have anything to complain of'—Uncle Pepper smiled complacently—'the Dean of St. Winnifred's is generally considered a proud man, but I always find him delightfully sociable when we meet at the Vicar of Llandhul's dinner-table.'

'Naturally,' said Miss Bratton, in a tone that implied her belief in Mr. Pepper Smith's equality with archbishops.

The tea gong sounded, and Uncle Pepper conducted my new companion to the dining-room.

'I suppose I am to consider myself queen of the teacups,' she said, smiling into her employer's face.

Uncle Pepper smiled too as he shook his head.

'No, my dear Miss Bratton, we need not burden you with that tiresome dignity. There is the Empress of China.'

There was a kindness in his eyes as he looked at

me that made me laugh with a heartiness that seemed to please him at this pleasantry of his, while Helen Bratton looked at me with eyes that were not kind.

How like she was at that moment to the Mary Ellen Kelly who had told me I was 'always in her road.'

How different she looked the next moment when, seated beside Mr. John Westropp, she smiled the smile that I afterwards knew was her special charm, as she said—

'I have been a governess for five years, and yet I don't find the garment of humility an easy fit.'

His answer to her was lost in a question addressed to me by Colonel Gunn, and I did not hear much of the conversation started from that point, but I left the tea-table with the conviction that John Westropp thought Helen Bratton a woman worth talking to.

When we returned to the drawing-room Uncle Pepper and Colonel Gunn sat down to chess, and Eugene watched the players, not because he was interested in the game, but because an appearance of interest pleased his father.

I turned over the pages of the Gregorian chant-book, which was rather less interesting to me than the chess was to Eugene, but which I examined as attentively as I could, to please Eugene, while my new companion absorbed Mr. Westropp in her conversation.

I was near enough, and the room was quiet enough for me to hear their low-toned but clear-voiced discussion of what was then George Eliot's latest novel.

Dickens I was learning to love, Thackeray I was beginning to know, but George Eliot I had never heard of.

Hopelessly lost in the wide field of philosophic thought to which *Middlemarch* led, I listened with envious ears to Helen Bratton's fluent conversation in a language of which I did not then know the alphabet.

'She looks almost beautiful now,' murmured Eugene in my ear.

He had left his father's side for a moment, and seemed fascinated, as I was, by the two who were not playing chess. I secretly wondered if some one else thought her altogether beautiful at the time, as I said—

'She is flushed just now, and colour is becoming to her.'

'And you, my cousin, are paler than usual,' said Eugene, regarding me with gentle concern.

'I am green,' I said with a sickly smile, 'green with jealousy of people who are cleverer than I am.'

Eugene opened his blue eyes, not in the least understanding what I did not quite understand myself.

'You may come in if you like,' said Miss Bratton, as I was about to say good-night at her room door. 'I feel more equal to talking to you now than I did on my arrival. I was tired then, and I always find new acquaintances tiresome if they are girls. Girls are the only good things I have ever had too much of.'

'I am not exactly a new acquaintance,' I said, standing opposite to her as she sat down by the fire. 'We were acquainted long before to-night.'

'Were we really? I have met so many girls during the last five years that I can't profess to remember them all, but I have a sort of a kind of an idea that I have heard your name before. Ah, now I know'—and she laughed the laugh I had heard in Mr. Malone's schoolroom—'you are the naughty little girl the schoolmaster was going to slap. What fun! I must tell that little Irish tale to your friends in Wales some day. How they will enjoy it!—especially Mr. Westropp, who has such a fine sense of humour. Imagine those eyes of his when I draw the picture of Rosamund Plunkett and her copy-book among a crowd of corduroys waiting for her taste of the stick.'

'Oh, don't,' I cried in agony, imagining those eyes only too well. 'Oh, why are you always so unkind to me, Mary Ellen?'

Old-time impressions were that moment so strong that the old name slipped naturally from me.

It was her turn to say 'don't' now.

'Don't dare to call me by that odious name,' she cried, starting up from her chair. Her pale face was flaming now, and she looked a giantess of wrath as she stood over me, but I would have dared to call her by that odious name again if her mood had not suddenly changed.

The flush died out of her face, and left it deadly pale.

'Rosey,' she said, with trembling lips, 'I have had an unhappy life. Don't be nasty to me.'

'I will be as nice to you as you like,' I said, deeply moved by this appeal of my old enemy; 'I have often been unhappy myself.'

‘Well, if you are unhappy now, it is your own fault,’ she said, relapsing into the mood in which I knew her best. ‘Now, look here, Rosamund Plunkett. If you want to live comfortably under the same roof with Helen Bratton you must from this night forth forget Mary Ellen Kelly as completely as you want Helen Bratton to forget the Rosamund Plunkett who was going to be slapped. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I understand that much.’

‘But you want to understand more. Now, say your little say once for all, and don’t stare that big stare. I have been a governess so long that you must excuse me if I remind you that it is very rude to stare.’

‘Well,’ I said, speaking out the thought in my mind, ‘I can’t think how you changed from Mary Ellen Kelly into Miss Helen Bratton.’

‘And I don’t see the necessity of your thinking anything about it,’ she answered, looking at me steadily with her clear cold eyes; ‘but there is no great mystery in the matter. My nurse chose to call me Mary Ellen, because that was the name of her own dead child, and my nurse’s friends thought proper to call me Mrs. Kelly’s little girl because my nurse’s name was Kelly. When my father came home from India and took me from Mrs. Kelly I was naturally called by my own name.’

‘I am sorry your father died so soon,’ I said as I remembered the kindness of the red-nosed doctor.

‘And I am sorry he did not die sooner,’ said the dead man’s daughter. ‘It would have made all the

difference in life to me if he had not lived long enough to drink the last insurance instalment he had the means of paying. You don't look as if you admired my sentiments, Miss Plunkett. Well, perhaps they are not what Mr. Eugene Smith would call beautiful, but you must take them as they are, and that is just what governessing has made them.'

'What about your mother?' I asked, turning to what I hoped would be a pleasanter subject.

'Mrs. Kelly was the only mother I ever knew,' said Helen, beginning to wind her watch. 'I wonder if there is any difference between English and Welsh time? My own mother died at a very early stage of my existence, and before then a difference of opinion parted her from my father. I suppose it was a religious difference. She was a Catholic, and he called himself a Protestant.'

'But,' I said, not yet fully enlightened by her explanation, 'did you not say that your mother was a dean's daughter?'

'And are you going to say, like little Dombey, that you don't believe that story?' asked Miss Bratton, shutting her watch with a sharp snap.

'Oh no,' I exclaimed, ashamed of my seeming impertinence; 'I only wondered how a dean's daughter could be a Catholic.'

'Are there no Catholic deans?' she asked, unfastening a jet bracelet.

'There may be,' I said; 'but Catholic clergymen don't marry.'

'And do Protestant clergymen never turn into Catholic clergymen, or is it an impossible thing for

a Protestant young woman to turn Catholic in spite of a clerical papa?’

‘I suppose not,’ I admitted, feeling the feebleness of my late objections.

‘Deans’ daughters may change their religion, and so may deans,’ said Helen, taking off her second bracelet; ‘but all this sort of thing is mere detail, and I detest detail, especially if it is religious detail.’

I looked with some surprise at the Miss Bratton who had been such invaluable help to the author of *Scylla and Charybdis*.

‘You would not talk like that to Dr. Narrowby,’ I said, speaking the thought of my mind.

She executed her favourite French shrug in a very creditable way considering the British breadth of her shoulders.

‘I talk all things to all men—church talk to Dr. Narrowby, tall talk to Mr. Pepper Smith, small talk to Colonel Gunn, foolish talk to your cousin Eugene, and wise talk to your friend Mr. Westropp. My line is adaptability.’

‘I don’t think it is an honest line,’ I said.

‘That is because you are a fool,’ said she.

‘I would rather be a fool than a fraud,’ I said hotly.

‘You are welcome to your choice,’ she said coolly, ‘and I will do you the justice to say that you looked your part this evening when I was talking to Mr. Westropp. That is a man worth cultivating, and I mean to cultivate him. Good-night, Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett. By the bye, I should rather like to know how you rose

out of the corduroy atmosphere into this state of life ?'

'It is a very simple story,' I said, 'and you can hear it whenever you like.'

'Thank you,' she said, with a small yawn behind a large hand. 'Some other night your simple story may be useful to me as a sleeping draught, but I don't want anything in that way to-night. After all the Castle Plunkett I don't feel disposed to call you Miss Plunkett or Miss anything. You wouldn't call me "Miss," don't you remember? That's why you were going to be slapped, don't you know? I'll call you Rosey for the sake of old times. The name does not suit you as well as it did once. You had rather that sort of colour when you were a child. I suppose I should have known you sooner if you had kept your complexion. As well as I can remember, your colour was your best point. What a pity you lost it so soon, my dear! You are really a prematurely aged young person. When I was standing beside you in a strong light this evening I noticed some gray hairs in your head. How very odd! You can't be quite twenty yet, though you look more.'

'No,' I answered, irritated by the general tone of criticism, but rather flattered by the assurance that I looked as much over as I had feared I looked under my age. 'I am not eighteen, and I was not eight when my gray hairs came. I have had them since the night you frightened me with the story of John Darker.'

She laughed. I have heard Helen Bratton's laugh called musical, but its music never charmed me.

‘My dear Rosey, I accept your white hairs as the highest compliment to my early dramatic genius. Yes, now I remember the lovely fright I gave you. I am afraid I can never do anything half so delicious again. You are too old now to frighten with a bogey man like John Darker.’

CHAPTER XII

MR. WESTROPP'S LODGINGS

MISS BRATTON was nominally my companion, and received a salary as such ; but for another and more real office she only sought the reward of Mr. Pepper Smith's approval.

'Do give me something to do,' she said soon after her arrival. 'I only count it a pleasure to keep Rosamund company, and life must not be all pleasure—must it, Mr. Smith?' And she smiled the smile that men called winning. 'Let me have something in the way of duty to relieve me from the horrible dread of cumbering this pleasant ground.'

'My dear Miss Bratton,' said Uncle Pepper, glowing with approval, 'your conscientious mind delights me, and you will really oblige me by looking after the housekeeping. I have asked Rosamund to overlook the servants, but she has not shown the spirit I naturally expected in correcting their faults.'

He turned on me a look of reproof, of which I felt deserving. I knew I had not distinguished myself in the interviews with cook about over-

done beef and underdone veal, and I despised myself heartily for the apologetic tone I had taken on those occasions.

The kitchen had no terrors for Helen Bratton. She feared not the face of servants, and what had been a dreadful ordeal to me was only so much agreeable exercise to her. In the course of an early morning walk abroad she discovered the little arrangement between cook and butcher, by which the former profited to the extent of a halfpenny on each pound of meat supplied by the latter, and she made haste to express her decided opinion that Mr. Pepper Smith's pocket was the proper place for that halfpenny. This opinion was most approvingly endorsed by Mr. Pepper Smith, who likewise rejoiced greatly in the saving of a weekly pound of soap that resulted from Miss Bratton's exact calculation of laundry expenses.

Cook and laundry-maid both gave notice the same day, but Mr. Pepper Smith's new housekeeper accepted the duty of engaging new servants with a cheerfulness that was highly pleasing to her employer.

Miss Bratton was not more popular among the ladies of the semi-detached villas than among the maid-servants of Bryn Hall; but Miss Bratton did not take the line of adaptability with women.

'My duty towards my neighbour,' she said once in a confidential moment—'my duty towards my neighbour is to make every man in love with himself, and to do to all women as I would by no means let them do unto me.'

Helen Bratton was Ishmaelitish in her attitude

towards the widows and spinsters of Uncle Pepper's dominion, but her antagonistic hand was so soft that no one could reasonably resent its touch.

'Yes, dear Mrs. Evans,' she said to the gentle widow who was interested in Uncle Pepper's bronchial cough, 'linseed tea is very good for the chest, and is generally so easy to take that I could not in the least understand Mr. Smith's objection to what you so kindly sent him till I found you had sweetened it with liquorice. I immediately had some more made with sugar-candy, and that has made all the difference. Mr. Smith actually drinks it for pleasure, and his cough is nearly gone. I sent your bottle to the lodge-woman's boy, who has got the whooping-cough, but the little wretch does not like it, and his mother has to whip him over every dose. Isn't it too absurd? I thought that sort of child could swallow anything.'

'Oh, Mrs. Hughes, what a pity you wasted your money on that unfortunate book,' she lamented to another who had made Uncle Pepper what she considered an irreproachable birthday present. 'The author is an American Dissenter, and some of his views are shockingly unsound. Mr. Smith did not see anything wrong with this book till I convinced him of the under-current of heresy in certain passages, but once his eyes were opened he refused to read another line. I have assured him over and over again that you could have had no idea of the real nature of the book, and I daresay he will forgive you in time, but you must expect him to be a little cool in his manner for a while. He is so splendidly orthodox, don't you know?'

'I assure you, Miss Price, Mr. Smith was quite alarmed about you on Sunday,' she said to a dressy spinster who had prematurely appeared in spring attire. 'He thought you looked frightfully ill in church, but I told him it was the blue next to your face that made it look so ghastly. Blue is such a trying colour when these wretched east winds shrivel up the skin.'

The spinster, who was not quite so easily crushed as the widows, boldly declared her opinion that the shade of Miss Bratton's own church bonnet was not generally becoming.

'Not generally becoming, but it suits me,' said Helen, with the unassailable confidence to which much of her social success was due. 'I am one of those lucky people to whom the generally unbecoming is particularly becoming.'

Sometimes I felt as if the discomfort of women all more or less kind to me was more than I could bear.

'How can you be so nasty to them?' I asked her once with tears in my eyes; 'they are such nice old ladies.'

She answered laughing.

'They won't think you a nice young lady when I tell them you call them old ladies. Oh yes, they are very nice, but your cousin Eugene is nicer, and I will do my little best to keep his dear papa from giving him a mamma who might not be so dear.'

One day in the beginning of April we both travelled with Uncle Pepper by the first train to Manchester, where Helen thought she saw her way to providing Bryn Hall with an incorruptible cook.

Uncle Pepper parted from us at the railway station, and directed his steps to the warehouse, while we moved towards the neighbourhood where the well-advertised domestic treasure was on view. As it was rather far from the town I suggested a cab, but Helen would not hear of any such extravagance.

There was, she said, an omnibus that would bring us within an easy walk of our destination, and it was desirable to make the sum total of our day's expenses as small as possible.

'A shilling will cover our double 'bus fares, and we could not get a cab there and back for less than five,' said the prudent Helen. 'Four shillings saved are four shillings gained to Mr. Smith.'

And by this time accustomed to his small economies, I knew how that gain would be appreciated by Uncle Pepper, who had ungrudgingly paid our first-class railway fares.

Having had a satisfactory interview with the present guardian of the treasure about to be transferred to Bryn Hall, we were walking towards our return 'bus when we saw it afar off speeding on its townward way.

'I say, Rosey,' said Helen, 'let us walk the whole way and save yet another sixpence.'

'It will soon rain,' I said, looking up at the April sky.

'Well, you are a very sweet girl,' said my companion, 'but you are not exactly sugar.'

'Neither of us will melt,' I answered, 'but our clothes may be damaged.'

Helen laughed.

'Mr. Smith will treat us to new gowns on the strength of the saved sixpence.'

We had walked about another half mile before the first drop fell, and I was putting up my umbrella when I caught sight of the name on a neat red-brick terrace that I had not noticed when passing it before in the omnibus, for the simple reason that my back was then towards that side of the road.

'Liverpool Terrace?' I exclaimed.

'Well, what is there so remarkable about it?' asked Miss Bratton.

'Nothing,' I said, sheltering a reddening face from inquisitive eyes with my umbrella, 'only Mr. Westropp lodges here.'

'What do you know about Mr. Westropp's lodgings?' asked Helen sharply.

'Uncle Pepper thought he was extravagant in taking the *Saturday Review*, and said he could have his when he had done with it, and he said he would like me to address it to him.'

'Your pronouns are confusing, Miss Plunkett. Which he was it who asked you to address the paper?'

'Mr. Westropp,' I said, feeling more and more thankful for the mercy of my umbrella screen.

'I'll tell you what,' said Helen—there were times when the natural accent of Mary Ellen Kelly triumphed over the artificial refinement of the Helen Bratton tone, and that accent struck sharply on my ear now—'I'll tell you what, Rosey, my dear, we'll just take shelter in Mr. Westropp's lodgings until the rain is over. What is the number?'

'No. 3; but, Helen, I would rather not go in,'

I said, with a shrinking for which I could not have given the shadow of a reason. 'He may be there.'

'It is possible,' said Helen, with her foot on the doorstep of No. 3, 'it is possible, but scarcely probable that a business man comes all this way out of town to lunch; but even if he is there, he won't eat us. He isn't a cannibal, don't you know?'

She knocked at the door, which was opened by a tall, sallow woman, with a towel on her head and a sweeping brush in her hand.

'May we shelter for a few minutes?' asked Helen, with the smile that she sometimes did not think altogether wasted on a woman. 'We are friends of Mr. Westropp, and this young lady is a niece of Mr. Pepper Smith. She saw the name of the terrace and persuaded me to stop here instead of walking on in the rain.'

She was smiling straight into the face of Mr. Westropp's landlady, and could not therefore catch my indignantly protesting look.

'Oh yes'm, to be sure'm, with pleasure'm,' said the landlady, who looked worried rather than pleased. 'I'm in the middle of my spring clean, and the 'ouse is hupside down, and there ain't a parlour fit to show you into, but if you don't mind a seat in the kitchen, which is pretty tidy, I'll get the girl to bring in Mr. Westropp's two arm-chairs. She's a-beatin' o' them in the yard, but if it's a-goin' to rain they're best in the 'ouse.'

'No arm-chairs for us, please, no parlour furniture of any kind,' said Helen, as our leader cleared from our way some obstructions not belonging to the hall. 'Nothing could be nicer than this dear old sofa,'

she exclaimed with rapture as we entered the kitchen.

She seated herself with queenly condescension, and bestowed another smile of gracious sweetness on Mr. Westropp's landlady. The landlady did not look a very impressionable person, but Miss Bratton in a gracious mood was irresistible.

'Well'm, it's as comfortable a seat as any in the 'ouse, though I 'ave furniture that's more helegant to look at, and it's a dear old sofa to me. Many's the 'appy day I sat on it alongside of *'im*.'

The landlady turned a tearful eye towards a large black-framed memorial card on the opposite wall, where we read the name of Henry Diggles, Master Mariner, who had perished off the coast of Anglesey, at the age of forty-nine.

'He went by the name of "'Andsome 'Arry,"' said Mrs. Diggles, wiping her eyes with the towel she had taken off her head.

'You must have been a handsome pair,' said Helen, looking unblushingly into the face of Mr. Westropp's landlady, while my own face burned with the painful fear that the shrewd-eyed, sallowskinned Mrs. Diggles would suspect sarcasm.

But, to my relief, Mrs. Diggles responded with the natural air of one accepting a familiar compliment.

'Well'm, when Diggles and me was married at St. Peter's Church, Liverpool, there was folks that said many worse-lookin' couples 'ad been seen in that same church. Oh yes'm,' in answer to an affable question from Miss Bratton, 'I am a Liverpool woman, and when I was 'ouse-'untin' in Man-

and the young lady, who was named Miss Liverpool, turned round and looked at him with a questioning smile. "What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her. "What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her. "What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"What is the name of the young lady?" "Miss Liverpool," he answered, and then turned round and looked at her.

"The *Croquet*," he answered. "Oh, how!"

"Well, what is the little sensation now?" asked the young lady on the sofa.

'The *Conqueror*,' I repeated breathlessly. 'The ship that brought me from Australia with papa. Oh, Helen, you know.'

'Yes, I know,' said Helen, straightening her glove fingers after her careful fashion; 'but really, Rosey, if I were you I would not talk so freely about Australia as you are disposed to do.'

'What is the difference between talking about Australia and talking about India?' I asked.

'Only this,' she answered: 'India is suggestive of British officers. Australia is suggestive of British convicts.'

'I hope you don't think my father was a convict,' I said indignantly.

'Not at all,' she said languidly, folding her gloves together. 'I have no reason to suppose that he was anything worse than an unsuccessful squatter.'

'Digger,' I corrected.

Miss Bratton performed her pet shrug.

'Digger or squatter, or what you will, there is the same suggestion of vulgarity that does not harmonise with the idea of Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett. Why on earth is the title of Castle Plunkett tacked to your name?'

'For the same reason that you save sixpences,' I retorted. 'Because Uncle Pepper likes it.'

Mrs. Diggles now reappeared with a pink-ribboned cap that I thought rather less becoming than the towel.

'We are admiring that beautiful ship,' said Helen. 'Was your husband captain of her?'

'Oh, dear, no,' said Mrs. Diggles. 'Poor 'Arry never rose that 'igh. He was master of the *Mary*

Jane, that was nothing like the ship the *Conqueror* was; but my youngest boy, Jerry—he was called Jeremiah after my father, but he never got anything but Jerry after he went to sea—my boy Jerry served his time on the *Conqueror*, and he painted that picture with his own dear 'and.'

In her glow of motherly pride Mrs. Diggles looked for the moment beautiful in my eyes.

'It is a marvellous work of art,' said Helen. 'Did you never think of sending it to the Royal Academy, Mrs. Diggles?'

'I wouldn't let it out of the 'ouse for fifty pound,' said the unsuspecting mother of the artist. 'I *did* hoffer to 'ang it in Mr. Westropp's parlour, and I must say I felt a bit 'urt when he wouldn't 'ave it there, though, to be sure, he spoke quite nice and feelin'. "I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Diggles," he says, "and if you've any more of your son's pictures I'll be proud to 'ang them on my parlour wall." "Mr. Westropp," says I, "that's all I 'ave to show of Jerry's 'andiwork, and I meant the hoffer as a compliment I wouldn't pay every lodger." "And I take it as such, Mrs. Diggles," says he, with that beautiful smile of his, "and you must not think me ungrateful. The fact is, Mrs. Diggles," says he, with a sigh, "there's memories connected with that there ship as is best buried out of sight," says he.'

'How very odd!' said Miss Bratton.

I, too, thought it very odd, but I said nothing.

'The best of us is hodd at times,' said Mrs. Diggles, 'and I 'aven't a word but good to say of Mr. Westropp, who pays liberal and pays punctual. Oh, he's quite the gentleman is Mr. Westropp, and

he hacts like a Christian to the poor widow, though I ain't sure he is a Christian hout and hout.'

'Why do you doubt his Christianity in a general way?' asked Helen.

'Well'm,' answered Mrs. Diggles, cutting the top off a fresh loaf, 'it's not for me to judge, but I can't say I think it's a sign of grace in the 'art when the 'ead is cram full of novels and noospapers and such-like. Mr. Westropp's got a heap o' books, and he said I was welcome to any of 'em I cared to borrow, but I couldn't find one to my mind among the lot. I got 'old of one called *Vanity Fair*, but I soon dropped it when I found it wasn't took from the *Pilgrim's Progress*. My father was a local preacher, and I was brought up strict, and thinks too much of the time for which I must give account to waste it on silly tales about make-believe folks as God never created, and as never lived nowhere but in the vain imagination of the 'uman 'ead. 'Owever, I am thankful to say that I feel more 'opeful about Mr. Westropp than I did. It was just afore you young ladies knocked at the door I was a-clearin' of a cupboard in his bedroom, when I came across a pious book as I thought I'd like to look at. The name of it is *The Young Man's Guide to Faith and Piety*, and I 'ope I'll 'ave time to make a few hextracts from it to put in my next letter to my boy Jerry, away in foreign lands far from the means of grace. P'raps you'd like to have a look at it while the tea draws. I 'ave it quite 'andy.'

Mrs. Diggles paused in her bread-cutting to open a drawer in the press beside her, from which she

took a book bound in faded red morocco, with a gilt-lettered title.

Helen, who was near her, took the book into her hand.

‘There is hope for Mr. Westropp if he treasures up this kind of literature in secret places,’ she said, opening it with languid curiosity.

Suddenly her white face flushed red, and she looked up from the book to me with eyes that were not languid.

‘What is it? Let me see, Helen,’ I said curiously as I drew near to her.

‘Not for worlds,’ she said, shutting the book, and clasping it in two large, firm hands.

‘Well, I’m sure,’ said Mrs. Diggles in an injured tone. ‘I should think a book like that might be put into the ‘and of any young person.’

‘Not in this young person’s,’ said Miss Bratton with decision.

‘But, Helen, why may I not see the book as well as you?’ I asked in a voice as injured as that of Mrs. Diggles.

‘My dear,’ answered my companion in the governess tone that was always particularly distasteful to me, ‘it is sufficient for you to know that you must not.’

We began to drink our tea in what was to me a very uncomfortable silence, and kept that silence till Miss Bratton spoke again.

‘May I ask, Mrs. Diggles, if you have looked into this book?’

‘I ‘adn’t time,’ said Mrs. Diggles stiffly. ‘I just saw the name of it on the cover.’

'That is well,' said Miss Bratton. 'And now, Mrs. Diggles, with your permission I will keep it in my possession till I have an opportunity of returning it to Mr. Westropp. I scarcely think he calculated on your turning out that particular cupboard when he gave you a general permission to read his books.'

'I turned out the cupboard in the course of my dooty,' said Mrs. Diggles, with a toss of her pink cap and a red spot on each of her high cheek bones, 'and I am the last in the world to go a-pokin' my nose into a lodger's private business. It wasn't for me to know there was private business in a pious book. Take the book with you by hall means, m'm, and please be so good as to tell Mr. Westropp at the same time that I was hinnocent of the smallest hidea of meddling with what was no concern of mine.'

'Oh, I'll make it all right, my good soul,' said Helen, with gracious condescension. 'This is delicious tea. Oh, pray don't mind sweets for us,' as Mrs. Diggles took a jam pot out of the press.

'The young lady might like a taste o' jam,' said Mrs. Diggles, with a friendly look at me. 'Young folks is partial to sweet stuffs, but it's different when one gets hup to thirty, which I suppose is somewhere about your hage, m'm.'

'I am not much over twenty,' said Helen, doubling a thin slice of bread and butter, 'but I suppose my height makes me look older than I am.'

'Oh, it's not the 'ight, it's your skin as looks helderly,' said Mrs. Diggles, with the candour not uncommon in lower middle-class speech. 'You are

a bit flushed now, but when I hopened the door to you I thought you 'ad a very bad colour for a red-'aired person. Most red-'aired folks 'ave such good skins. 'Owever, we are hall as the Lord made us, and must be content with our looks, much as some of us may wish for a sweet young daisy of a face.'

Mrs. Diggles looked at me again with a friendly eye, and I was uncomfortably conscious that at that moment she was the unconscious avenger of many soft but stinging blows dealt out by Helen Bratton to the widows and spinsters of Llandhul society.

'Rosamund,' said Miss Bratton, rising, 'the rain is over, and I shall have one of my worst headaches if I stay any longer in this close atmosphere. I will put on my gloves at the door, and you can follow me when you have done eating bread and jam. Good morning, Mrs. Diggles. I am afraid your house is not healthy. Perhaps, all things considered'—shutting the red book into her hand-bag with a significant snap—'Mr. Westropp may find a change of residence desirable.'

'Mr. Westropp must please himself, as no doubt he will,' said Mr. Westropp's landlady, with a look that was also significant if I could have understood it. ''Ave some more jam, my pretty?'

'No, thank you,' said I, to whom this flattering invitation was addressed, 'but you are very kind.'

I held out my hand in farewell as I rose to follow Miss Bratton, already at the hall door, and the woman suddenly stooped and kissed me.

'I lost a dear girl of about your hage,' she said, with misty eyes,—'the only girl I 'ad. It's many a

long year since the Lord took her, but I'm still lonesome without her.'

Mr. Westropp's landlady no longer looked hard-featured or sallow-skinned in my eyes, and as we stood together by the picture of the *Conqueror*, I longed to tell her how lonesome I had been without Mick for many long years.

'I am off,' cried a clear, sharp voice from the door, and I hastened after my vanishing companion.

She was a silent companion during the long walk, of which I was very tired when we reached the railway station, where we found Mr. Westropp.

'Mr. Smith sent me to see that you had some lunch,' he said, 'and I have had rather a long wait.'

'And we have had rather a long walk,' said Helen, smiling brightly into his face.

'Surely you have not walked all the way into town?' he asked incredulously.

'We surely have,' she answered, still smiling.

'How tired you must both be!'

Though he said 'both' he only looked at me, and there was such soft compassion in his brown eyes that I no longer felt tired.

'Don't pity us,' said the smiling Helen. 'We were well fortified with bread and jam—at least Rosamund was. Have you ever seen Rosamund eating bread and jam, Mr. Westropp? Oh, thank you, we don't want any more lunch. We sheltered from the rain in your lodgings—Rosamund said you lodged in Liverpool Terrace, or, of course, I shouldn't have known—and your landlady entertained us royally.'

'I am afraid Mrs. Diggles is scarcely in her usual form for royal entertainments on cleaning days,'

laughed Mr. Westropp, stopping at the door of the first-class refreshment room.

'Now, Mr. Westropp,' said Helen, walking on, 'it is Lent, and you must not tempt good churchwomen to a second lunch the same morning. Besides, we have only time to get comfortably settled into a carriage before the train starts.'

'Wait for the next,' he pleaded, 'and go home with Mr. Smith.'

'Mr. Smith's housekeeper must be home before Mr. Smith's tea-time,' said Helen gaily. 'Find us an empty carriage, please, Mr. Westropp.'

In another minute we were settled in opposite corners, with Mr. Westropp standing at the door of the carriage.

'Oh, Mr. Westropp,' said Helen, smiling at him, 'where is your artistic soul?'

'With humility,' he answered, smiling back at her, 'I hope it is like my heart, in the right place.'

'Then why,' said Helen, with her bright gaze steadily fixed on him—'why did you refuse to have the picture of the *Conqueror*, painted by Jeremiah Diggles, hung on your parlour wall?'

At the name of the *Conqueror* his face darkened, and it seemed to be with an effort that he answered her light words lightly.

'Perhaps my artistic soul draws the line at amateur paintings.'

'So I supposed,' said Helen, continuing her smiling gaze. 'But Mrs. Diggles gave me to understand that it was the subject of this particular painting rather than its treatment that offended your eye.'

'My landlady seems to have been communicative,' said Mr. Westropp unsmilingly.

"She has the passions of her kind," quoted Helen merrily, 'a passion for cupboard-clearing among them. Perhaps, Mr. Westropp, you did not take thought for the spring cleaning when you left this in your cupboard.'

She opened her hand-bag and took out the faded red book with the gilt-letter title.

The face that had so suddenly clouded at the name of the *Conqueror* was very dark as John Westropp took the book from Helen Bratton's hand.

'I thought you would not like it left in the way of the vulgar,' said Helen in her softest voice. 'So I rescued it from Mrs. Diggles, who revenged herself after her kind. She gave Rosamund all the jam.' And Helen laughed her softest laugh.

Then becoming grave as he stood with downcast head at the carriage door, she spoke to him in the sweetly soothing tone of an ideal hospital nurse speaking to a wounded soldier.

'Don't be troubled. Mrs. Diggles had not time to open the book before I rescued it, and no one has seen it open but me. I would not let Rosamund look into it.'

Then John Westropp lifted his downcast head and murmured something that sounded like 'Thank God.'

CHAPTER XIII

DISCORD

‘ROSE,’ said Eugene one evening in early May, ‘is it not time to publish the betrothal?’

Tea was over, and the master of Bryn Hall, lately inspired with an enthusiasm for kitchen gardening, had gone forth with his ever-sympathetic housekeeper to view his growing cabbages in the sunset light.

‘There is nothing like a fresh-cut cabbage,’ said Uncle Pepper as he passed the open window near the piano, where Eugene was playing ‘I rise from dreams of thee.’

I was listening with the peculiar pleasure that Eugene’s music always gave me to the beautiful air he was playing, with his own beautiful variations, when, with his dreamy eyes still on the piano, he asked the question about the betrothal.

‘Whose betrothal?’ I asked in surprise.

‘Dear cousin,’ said Eugene, rising from the piano, ‘of whose betrothal should I speak but yours and mine?’

Then he bent one knee and clasped two hands like a lover in an opera, or rather, I should say, like

my own idea of an operatic lover taken from a picture on the cover of an Italian song to which I was not partial.

'Oh, Eugene,' I cried in angry confusion, 'how can you be so dreadfully ridiculous?'

Eugene rose and stood before me with the look that at times made him so like the father he was generally so unlike.

'Cousin Rosamund, I am sorry you are so strangely out of harmony with the occasion as to see absurdity in anything so beautiful as a lover's devotion. Nothing hurts me so deeply as discord.'

His fair boyish face flushed in the same painful way as on the evening when the parochial school-room form had been dropped on his toes.

'I am sorry I am discordant,' I said, with a painful heat in my own face, 'but you have shocked me, Eugene.'

'Ah, I was too sudden,' he exclaimed, clasping two penitent hands. 'You were not prepared, as I have been, by recent conversations with papa for the idea of our betrothal. It was strange to me at first, but has now grown so beautifully familiar that I forgot the possibility of startling you. Forgive me, dear Rose of the world.'

'Oh, of course I forgive you,' I said, hastily moving towards the door, 'but you must never speak to me like this again.'

'Stay, Rosamund,' said Eugene, with a gentle hand on my arm. 'I must speak to you like this again and again, till the idea of our betrothal is familiar to you.'

'Oh, Eugene,' I entreated, 'do not tease me.'

'Tease,' echoed Eugene, removing his caressing hand, and gazing at me with indignantly-surprised blue eyes. 'How can the wooing of such a lover as I am tease you, Rosamund? Am I not worthy to be loved?'

There were in those days many mirrors in the drawing-room of Bryn Hall, and in one of these Eugene surveyed himself with an approval that was too honest to be vain.

'Yes, Eugene,' I said, speaking with grateful warmth as I remembered his many loving-kindnesses, 'and I love you as a brother.'

'Brotherly and sisterly affection is beautiful,' sighed Eugene. 'It has always seemed to me one of the most beautiful of earthly affections, and I rejoiced in the thought that in you papa had provided me with the sister I yearned for, but papa has lately informed me that I must regard you as my betrothed.'

Unaccustomed as I was to be taken into consultation about things in general, it struck me as rather strange that this particular concern of my own had been settled by Uncle Pepper without any reference to my opinion.

'And now,' I said, asserting what I felt to be my right, 'you will have to tell your papa that I choose to be your sister.'

'Oh, I cannot,' protested Eugene; 'indeed, I cannot, dear Rose. You and I must be betrothed because papa wishes it. I have never disobeyed him.'

'But I need not obey him like you,' I said, growing desperate. 'He is not my father.'

'But he will be your father when you are my wife,' said Eugene eagerly. 'Think of that, Rosamund! You will be papa's daughter.'

I did think of it; but the thought was not so blissful to me as to Eugene, and I was silent, fearing any words spoken by me at that moment might be ungracious.

'Think of our beautiful wedding,' went on Eugene, with his most radiant smile. 'You will be a vision of beauty, my Rose. By day and by night I dream of you, kneeling at the altar with fresh fragrant orange blossoms on your meekly-bowed head and a veil of rare and costly lace over your modestly-blushing face, while the morning sunlight piercing the east window throws a crimson glory across the pure white satin of your wedding dress. Oh, Rose, consider the beautiful effect!'

As I was not without a certain weakness of my own for effect, the consideration was for the moment attractive.

'Think of our beautiful honeymoon,' continued Eugene, with sparkling eyes. 'Think of my native Switzerland, with its natural beauties, and of Italy, with its artistic treasures. We shall wander as in a beautiful dream, and as we pass from one scene of beauty to another the strange people who look upon us will say that we also are beautiful.'

I was still held silent by the fascination of Eugene's glowing picture seen by the light of my own vanity.

'And then,' concluded Eugene exultantly, 'we come home and live always with dear papa.'

The spell was broken, and I was in my right

mind. Orange blossoms, lace, glorified white satin, and the admiration of foreigners all faded into vain shadowland before the reality of Uncle Pepper's eyeglass.

'You must not say any more to me about weddings, Eugene,' I said firmly. 'I can never be anything but your sister.'

'But papa says you are to be my wife,' said Eugene quite as firmly.

'And I say I will not,' I said, driven to rudeness of speech by the gentle Eugene's persistence in upholding the absolute monarchy of his father.

'Rosamund,' said Eugene, speaking like his father's own son, 'you cannot resist papa's will.'

'I will try,' I said, with as brave a voice as a cowardly heart ever inspired.

Eugene looked at me with scared blue eyes.

'Papa will be so angry with you, Rosamund.'

'He is often angry with me, Eugene.'

'But perhaps he will be angry with *me*.' Eugene's pink face paled. 'He was angry with me once when I was a little boy. His anger was dreadful, and it made me ill.' Eugene shivered.

Then through the open window we heard the voice of Uncle Pepper returning with Miss Bratton from the kitchen garden.

'Papa is coming,' moaned Eugene, sinking into a chair and hiding his face in his hands. 'Oh, what shall I do?'

'Be a man,' I said in the excitement of the moment, giving the advice that had often trembled on my tongue.

But Eugene continued his childish moan.

Pepper Smith entered the room smiling, but at the sight of his mournful son his face changed.

'What is the matter, my boy?' he asked, bending anxiously over the bowed head.

Eugene uncovered his pale frightened face, and clasping both arms round his father's neck, burst into tears.

'Oh, dear papa, don't be angry. Rosamund will not be my betrothed, but I cannot help it; indeed I cannot, dear, dear papa.'

'Eugene, my darling,' said the father in a voice as tenderly soothing as a mother's, 'don't get excited. I am not angry with you. Be calm, my own boy, I entreat'

Eugene smiled through his tears as he might have smiled in his nursery days.

'And please don't be angry with Rosamund, dear papa.'

'With Rosamund,' said Pepper Smith in a changed voice. 'Ah, that is another matter.'

I had often been awed by Uncle Pepper's eyeglass, but not till that moment did I know how much more awful he could look without it.

'Oh, don't, dear papa,' said Eugene beseechingly. 'I cannot bear to see you look like that.'

'Then go where you will not see me, my son,' said the father, speaking to him in a gentle voice, but looking still sternly at me. 'I would rather you were out of the room just now. Go and play some of your organ music.'

Eugene seemed to hesitate between the pity for me that would have kept him in the room and the

obedience to his father that would remove him from an atmosphere of discord.

'Go, my boy,' said the voice that was now very firm in its gentle command. And Eugene went to seek the peace that his organ alone could give.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett,' said Uncle Pepper in a voice that was not gentle, 'why have you refused my son's offer of marriage?'

'Because,' I answered trembling, 'I can only think of him as a brother.'

'And, pray, what do you know about brothers? You never had a brother, had you?'

I was obliged to confess myself brotherless from my birth, and in that moment of supreme confusion could not find words to remind my kinsman of the letter in which he had invited me to be a sister to his son Eugene.

'And on the evening of your arrival at Bryn Hall, when my son expressed a wish to kiss you, you answered "Not yet." If you regarded my son as a brother why did you give him that coquettish reply? What is the meaning of your inconsistency, Rosamund Smith Plunkett?'

'Oh, I don't know, I don't know,' I cried, dragging out the three stupid words I had employed so often on that first evening.

Uncle Pepper laughed the appalling laugh of an angry man, and I hid my eyes, as Eugene had done, from the sight of his wrath.

'You don't know many things. You don't know the buttered side of your bread from the dry one. Miss Bratton, do you see this girl?'

Miss Bratton moved from the place where she

had been hitherto silent behind me to the side of Pepper Smith, who stood before me, and assured him that she saw me.

'Left an orphan at an early age,' began Uncle Pepper, like a Crown Prosecutor starting a criminal biography, 'Rosamund Smith Plunkett was supported by a man in the lower walks of life, who at his death bequeathed her the sum of three hundred pounds, desiring, with a prudence very commendable in an ignorant person, that it should be expended on her education. At the age of seventeen the most attractive prospect before Rosamund Smith Plunkett was the career of a governess in Australia, to which distant country her father's brother, Mr. Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, offered to pay her second-class passage. Now, Miss Bratton, you who have been a governess will be good enough to tell me in as few words as possible what you call the life of a governess.'

'Penal servitude,' said Miss Bratton.

'Penal servitude,' repeated Uncle Pepper. 'You, Miss Bratton, with your superior talents and well-balanced mind, have found the life of a governess one of penal servitude. Pray, what do you think the life of a governess would be to a girl of limited intelligence and unformed character like Rosamund Smith Plunkett?'

'Capital punishment,' said Miss Bratton.

'Capital punishment,' repeated Uncle Pepper, with approving emphasis. 'Very good, indeed, Miss Bratton. Very capital punishment. Well, at this critical stage of her affairs I, Pepper Smith, her mother's cousin, came to the rescue. Her father's brother, the Irish aristocrat, had offered to pay her

second-class passage to Australia. Her mother's cousin, the unpretending English merchant, was ready to pay her first-class fare through life. Mr. Plunkett of Castle Plunkett desired to send his poor relation to the Antipodes. Pepper Smith of Bryn Hall wished to retain the same poor relation in his own home. I am not a sentimental man, Miss Bratton, but there are reasons entirely apart from Rosamund Smith Plunkett's own merits that inspire the wish to unite her mother's daughter to my son. And now, Miss Bratton, what do you consider Rosamund Smith Plunkett's life with a young man like my son would be ?'

'An earthly paradise,' said Miss Bratton.

'An earthly paradise,' echoed Uncle Pepper, with the same approval bestowed on her previous sentiments. 'I object on principle to exaggerated expressions, but in this expression I see no exaggeration. And now, my dear Miss Bratton, what in your opinion is the young woman who rejects the offer of an earthly paradise ? Is she impudent or is she imbecile ?'

'Only inexperienced,' said Miss Bratton. 'My dear Mr. Smith, to appreciate an earthly paradise one must first pass through an earthly purgatory, and a due sense of gratitude for buttered bread can only be expected from those who have been accustomed to eat it dry. I have passed through the fiery trial of governessing, and I have eaten ashes for bread'—here Helen sighed—'but Rosamund knows nothing of the struggle for existence, and she does not understand.'

'No, she does not understand,' said Uncle Pepper,

‘but I am in the mind to make her understand. Now, Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, what do you think of changing the elegant leisure of Bryn Hall for the life of a working governess? Miss Bratton says that for you that life would be capital punishment, and I agree with her that it would be very capital punishment.’

He laughed a harsh laugh, and the adaptable Miss Bratton laughed in dutiful sympathy with her employer’s mirth.

In that horrible moment I felt like the Rosamund Plunkett of long ago threatened with a slap in Mr. Malone’s schoolroom.

The doctor’s daughter laughed here as she had laughed there, but now I saw no pale pock-marked face looking at me with eyes of anxious love, and heard no tender Irish voice asking what ailed Mick’s darling.

‘Let me go,’ I cried wildly ; ‘let me go anywhere or do anything but stay here.’

The next moment Helen Bratton’s arms were round me, and Helen Bratton’s voice was speaking in a tone that was strange to me.

‘My poor Rosey, you don’t know what you are saying. Please, Mr. Smith, do not take her foolish words seriously. After all, she is only a child, and the wisdom of Solomon can’t be expected at seventeen. Let her come with me now, and kindly excuse her from returning to the drawing-room to-night. I will come back presently and have a little talk with you.’

As we left the room together the sound of Gounod’s ‘Ave Maria’ came from the upper chamber

where Eugene was playing the organ, and at the same moment I was strangely thrilled by the tender pressure of the arm Helen Bratton had passed round my waist.

This was the first of the few times in which the touch of womanly kindness proved Helen Bratton's kinship with the world of womanliness.

CHAPTER XIV

HELEN AMONG THE PROPHETS

I DO not know what Miss Bratton said to Mr. Smith when she returned alone to the drawing-room on that evening of unhappy memory, or how far her little talk with him influenced his future dealings with me, though she gave me to understand that I owed my continued residence at Bryn Hall to her intercession.

‘I would rather go away,’ I said, with the impulsiveness of my foolish age. ‘I would rather earn my own dry bread than eat the butter that I don’t deserve.’

Helen Bratton looked at me with cold contempt. Her manner had rapidly chilled after that first sudden gleam of heart-warming womanly sympathy of which she was now perhaps repentful.

‘You have heard my opinion of governing,’ she said.

‘Governing is not the only way of earning money,’ I answered, with a glance at the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, open on my knee. ‘I think I could write a book if I tried.’

‘No doubt,’ said Helen, with her most chilling

smile ; ' but while you are trying to produce a second *Jane Eyre* it will be convenient for you to stay where you can have pen, ink, and paper free, gratis, and for nothing. Take my advice, Rosamund Smith Plunkett, and reserve your declaration of independence till the morning you awake to find yourself famous.'

Eugene did not speak to me again on the subject of our betrothal, and his father did not speak to me on any subject at all. Eugene had no longer to come between me and his father's displeasure, for though from that time forth Uncle Pepper often expressed his disapproval of my type of character in a general way, he did not recognise my individuality so far as to address me with direct reproof.

I had once shrank from the ominous sound of the 'Rosamund' so often associated with the uplifting of Uncle Pepper's eyeglass.

Now as I sat at the table where Miss Bratton reigned over the tea-cups in my stead, I would have welcomed the most severe sentence beginning with my baptismal name that had ever passed my benefactor's lips.

Through that summer I walked in sackcloth and ashes—that is to say, I was reduced to the humility of wearing such of the summer clothes as remained from my Thornville wardrobe.

Before the vexatious question of the betrothal disturbed existing arrangements another shopping excursion to Liverpool had been planned by Eugene, but now even Eugene's softly eloquent pleadings about the necessity of replacing my heavy garments with lighter ones prevailed not with his father.

The exceptional coolness of the early summer made my heavy gowns bearable for a time, but a sudden change to oppressive heat obliged me to seek refuge in what remained of Thornville cotton and muslin. These simply-fashioned materials had not escaped criticism in the Thornville schoolroom, and now Morgan was ready to weep over their antiquated cut as she did her hopeless best to adapt them to present circumstances.

When I made my first appearance at the breakfast-room door in a faded blue cotton, Helen smiled and Eugene sighed.

'I was not aware, Miss Bratton,' said the master of the house, 'that the new under-housemaid had already arrived.'

'Oh, dear Mr. Smith,' laughed Helen merrily, 'don't you see it is Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett in a washed-out frock? I am afraid the smart young person I have engaged as your under-housemaid would call it an old rag.'

'When that young person arrives,' said Uncle Pepper, 'please be good enough, my dear Miss Bratton, to make her understand that all ungrateful and disobedient young people must expect to come to rags.'

It was a severe ordeal for me to parade my rags before crop-headed youths in tweeds of the latest cut and their extremely fashionable sisters, but I shrank most of all from appearing like a school-girl in disgrace in the eyes of one ugly middle-aged man.

If Mr. John Westropp had refused to pay tribute to the dignity of a new sweeping train, what consideration would he give to an old skimpy skirt?

If he had teased me much in my French finery, would he not torment me more in my Irish rags?

But the unexpected happened on the first evening John Westropp spent at Bryn Hall after my descent into the valley of humiliation. I was trying to hide a faded muslin in the shadiest corner of the drawing-room when he came to my side and spoke to me with a deferential courtesy that my twelve-guinea gown had never inspired.

'So you are going to take your summer pleasure in America, Mr. Westropp?' said Miss Bratton that same evening from her place of honour at the tea-table.

'Not in America,' he answered, 'but on the way there and back. I shall be about my employer's business in New York, and my own pleasure will be on the ocean wave.'

'Have you ever been at sea before?' asked Helen, looking at him steadily.

'Yes,' he answered, looking not at her but into his tea-cup, 'I have been several times to the Isle of Man.'

'A cheap and nasty trip, isn't it?' asked Helen, still fixedly regarding him. 'A friend of mine who tried it once told me that he suffered more in a passage from Liverpool to Douglas than in a voyage to Australia. Could that have been true, Mr. Westropp?'

'There is scarcely any room for doubt if your friend is a truthful man,' said John Westropp, lifting his eyes to meet hers.

'I never made a special study of his character,' said Helen smilingly, sugaring her own tea, 'but as he looks like one of those happy people who have nothing to conceal, I suppose he is truthful. I dare-

say we should all be little George Washingtons if in the course of our little lives we had never destroyed cherry-trees with our little hatchets. I don't think it was George Washington's high principle that distinguished him from the ordinary small boy of the eighteenth century but his moral courage in maintaining that principle.'

'Wasn't there some physical courage too?' asked Mr. Westropp, with a little smile. 'If old Washington had taken the ordinary eighteenth-century view of small boys in mischief, he would probably have whipped young George for meddling with the cherry-tree instead of praising him for telling the truth.'

'How clearly you see my point,' said Helen, with the laugh that her admirers called musical. 'Ah yes, the spirit of humanity is truthful, but the flesh is not willing to be whipped. And then'—here her bright face shaded gravely, and she sank her voice to the effective tone that was always as clear as it was low—'and then our nineteenth-century society is even more severe than the eighteenth-century parent. The father of the old time before us chastised with whips, but the society of our own day chastises with scorpions. No wonder, when the price of truth is so heavy, that many, like Ananias and Sapphira, are tempted to keep back part of it. Now I know, dear Mr. Smith'—smiling once more as she looked at her employer—'that you will say principle ought to be maintained at any cost, and that you, Mr. Eugene'—beaming on her employer's son—'will say that nothing so ugly as a lie should be allowed to live in this beautiful world; but one must sometimes look at poor humanity from a point of view

that is neither immaculate nor æsthetic. What do *you* think, Mr. Westropp?’

The man she now illuminated was again looking into his tea-cup.

‘I think,’ he said meditatively, ‘I think, yes, I am sure, that I could drink another cup of tea.’

This apparently unimportant little piece of tea-table talk lingers in my mind because it was, as I afterwards knew, a link in the chain of evidence then forming in Helen Bratton’s mind.

The garden parties of Llandhul society generally came off on Saturdays, when the young men were released from Liverpool offices and Manchester warehouses early enough to join the maidens at afternoon tea. This now ancient institution was then an innovation to be attacked by Philistine fathers content with their own middle-class way of life, and defended by fashionable mothers who, like Sir Walter Raleigh, were ‘fain to climb.’

To these gatherings of stylish summer garments I went Saturday after Saturday in my unstylish school muslins, and to the same gay and festive scenes came John Westropp with the same regularity. These Saturdays were golden days to me, though I did not know then, as I know now, why I felt as happy as a queen in her coronation robes when I stood in my faded muslin beside John Westropp, or how it was that on these occasions the sand-hills of Llandhul looked like the delectable mountains of John Bunyan’s dream.

I did not understand the full meaning of my growing interest in the middle-aged heroes of romance, and I was not aware that anything but a

natural contempt for schoolroom fiction had cooled my affection for the once adorable curate in his early grave. I did not know why Lancelot thrice the age of Elaine was so much more charming than Angelina's young Edwin, or why ugly Rochester in *Jane Eyre* was so infinitely more attractive than the exquisite hero of *Lothair*.

I had not consciously shaped an image of 'my own ideal knight' in real life, but if bravery, courtesy, and kindness went to the making of ideal knight-hood, I thought it might be found in the prosaic form of middle-aged everyday manhood.

John Westropp had ridden a horse that had thrown the pluckiest of all crop-headed youths in Llandhul, and so I judged him to be brave. He had stepped into a muddy road to the injury of a spotless pair of boots in order to yield his place on the footpath to a bare-footed basket-woman, and so I decided that he was courteous. He had devoted himself to the entertainment of a cross little invalid unwisely brought to a garden party by her frisky young mother, and so I considered him kind.

About this time I fancied that I was not alone under the cloud of Uncle Pepper's displeasure, and that Mr. John Westropp's Saturday journeys to Llandhul were not so agreeable to my kinsman as they were to me.

'Are you coming with us, John Westropp?'

This question, asked by the master of Bryn Hall that winter night of penny-reading memory, was never asked these summer evenings when we were taking leave of entertainers on neighbouring lawns.

'My portmanteau is at the station,' my now con-

fidential friend would inform me each Saturday. 'I am quite prepared to make a respectable appearance at the parish church.'

But the destiny of that portmanteau was never Bryn Hall, and its owner went forth Sunday after Sunday to Llandhul Church from more hospitable doors.

We gave no garden parties at Bryn Hall. Uncle Pepper considered afternoon tea as pretentious as it was unwholesome, but he had no idea of lagging behind his neighbours in the matter of summer hospitality.

'Afternoon parties are senseless things,' said the adaptable Miss Bratton, who never looked her best in the afternoon light. 'Do, dear Mr. Smith, wait till the days are a little shorter, and let us have a sensible evening beginning with a high tea worthy of Bryn Hall. A little quiet dancing—none of the horrid round dances you dislike so much, but quadrilles and Lancers—you always enjoy walking through a quadrille, don't you?—with intervals of music and recitation. You will give us a little Shakespeare, won't you, Mr. Smith?'

'I make no rash promises,' said Uncle Pepper, but his smile was promising.

Miss Bratton having lately extracted from her employer the admission that in boyhood he had learned certain portions of Shakespeare, had been so gently persistent in drawing these treasures from the storehouse of his retentive memory, and was always so sweetly appreciative of his elocution, that Mr. Pepper Smith was almost persuaded to regard himself as a bright star lost to the theatrical profession.

‘But my principles would never have permitted me to go on the stage,’ said Uncle Pepper, with a motion of the hand that seemed to wave off the temptations of dramatic fame and fortune, ‘and I was originally destined for the Church.’

‘How beautifully you would have conducted the service,’ said Helen in the soft voice with which her own special service of praise was always conducted. ‘Even now, dear Mr. Smith, if you would only, like Mr. Gladstone, read the lessons in your parish church, many would travel farther than Hawarden to fare better at Llandhul.’

Elocution was Miss Bratton’s own strong point. She was not naturally musical, and music had not been introduced into her education early enough to make her even mechanically proficient, though a severe study of theory had made her a fairly competent teacher. She had not much voice for song, and the little she had was untuneful, but as a reader and reciter her voice had a strangely heart-moving, soul-stirring power.

As my own part was now generally a silent one, I had leisure to think while others talked, and I drew from Helen’s arrangement about recitations the conclusion that she intended to make a brilliant effect of her own on the evening under discussion.

‘I want to make sure of Mr. Westropp giving us a reading on Saturday night,’ said Miss Bratton one morning. ‘Will you please give him this note, Mr. Smith?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Smith, with a discourtesy that he had never yet shown to his highly-esteemed house-keeper. ‘John Westropp can’t do your pleasure on

Saturday, Miss Bratton, because he sails that day to New York on my business.'

Helen Bratton's white face flushed with what I then supposed to be annoyance at her employer's change of tone.

'Mr. Westropp said he was not going till next month,' she said.

She spoke quietly, with the slight suspicion of a shake in her voice, which I, supposing to be caused by the unpleasant sensation of Uncle Pepper's first snub, thought I quite understood.

'He did not expect to go till next month,' said Uncle Pepper, 'but it suits my convenience to send him this week. John Westropp is my servant, and when I say "do this" he must do it.'

'And no doubt he does it gladly,' said Helen, smiling into the frowning face of the man she also served. 'I am sure, dear Mr. Smith, that Mr. Westropp has good reason to respect your wishes.'

'He has the best of reasons,' said Uncle Pepper snappishly.

'John Westropp came to me years ago, at a time of crisis—of crisis, Miss Bratton—and I stood between him and ruin. I have made John Westropp the man he is to-day—a man respected in respectable society, because he holds the respectable position of manager to Pepper Smith of Manchester. Yes, he has the best of reasons for respecting my wishes; but I have my own reasons for suspecting that he disrespects certain of those wishes so far as to be the means of disappointing them. Do I speak in parables, Miss Bratton?'

‘I think I see your meaning, Mr. Smith,’ said Miss Bratton in her clearest, coldest voice.

‘And, pray, what would you call the man who could repay me in that way?’

‘I would not call him a man,’ said Miss Bratton, with a strange flash in her cold eyes; ‘I would call him a devil.’

Uncle Pepper raised his eyeglass in shocked surprise. He was not accustomed to the adaptable Miss Bratton in her spontaneous moods, and he had not expected anything like such strong language from the generally guarded lips of his model housekeeper. To me the language was not strange, but only too painfully familiar, and the Helen Bratton of to-day was never entirely separated from the Mary Ellen Kelly of ten years ago who had put me to bed in the dark.

‘Dear Mr. Smith,’ said Helen penitently, ‘I could not help it. I could not bear the thought of any one on earth appearing ungrateful to my own best friend, and in my excitement I used unwomanly language. Pray forgive me.’

There were tears in her eyes as she held out a hand which Pepper Smith pressed in both his own.

‘Dear Miss Bratton,’ he said with emotion, ‘your unwomanly language may well be forgiven for the sake of your womanly feeling.’

She smiled through her tears, and gently releasing her hand, moved towards the door. Then turning back, she said in her own calm, business-like tone—

‘By the bye, Mr. Smith, what do you think of changing the evening to Friday? Any of the young men can manage to come down to Llandhul on

Friday evening when they think it worth while, and don't they all think it worth while to come to Bryn Hall? Well, *rather*, as the horrid boys would say themselves in their own expressive slang.'

There were occasions on which the adaptable Miss Bratton expressed her own sentiments in very effective slang to the boys she now called horrid, but her dear Mr. Smith was never present on these occasions.

'And then, you know,' continued Helen, 'there will be no danger of our being unfitted for Sunday. Saturday night's pleasure is not the best preparation for Sunday morning's duty, is it, Mr. Smith?'

'The very worst,' said Uncle Pepper, who held strong Sabbatarian views. 'Friday, by all means, Miss Bratton.'

'And you will take my note to Mr. Westropp, won't you? It would be a Christian charity to break bread with him that last evening, wouldn't it?' she asked, drawing nearer to her own and John Westropp's employer, and looking into his clouded face with a saintly smile. 'It will be good for his soul's health to take the memory of your generous hospitality to the far country.'

'He will be back in a month,' said Pepper Smith impatiently. 'I really don't think there need be any sentimentality about his departure, Miss Bratton.'

She laid a gentle hand on his arm and smiled sweetly on.

'We know not what a month may bring forth,' she said softly. 'The blind may see and lunatics may be sane before they are a month older. I foresee miracles.'

Her smile was now so brilliant that it cleared away the clouds of the face it shone on, and Pepper Smith smiled too.

‘I foresee the loss of my train if I listen to the voice of the charmer a moment longer,’ he said, with a gay gallantry. ‘Give me your note, my dear Miss Bratton, and I will explain about the change of day.’

CHAPTER XV

'THE DREAM OF EUGENE ARAM'

'It is unlucky to meet on the stairs,' said Miss Bratton, who had a few pet superstitions. 'Make haste up, Rosamund.'

I looked at her in astonished admiration as I ascended to the landing where she stood, dressed for our Friday evening entertainment.

That August day had been remarkably dull and chill, and the premature darkness of the evening had justified Mr. Smith's housekeeper in ordering blinds to be drawn and gas to be lit much earlier than her economical want.

Artificial light and evening dress were always becoming to Helen Bratton, but I had never seen her looking as she looked now. I had often seen the same queenly sweep of skirt and the same striking contrast of black lace and white skin, but I had never seen the same red hair arranged with plaits and pearls into anything so like a crown.

This regal style of hair-dressing was not the only thing to be remarked about the same but different Helen on whom my puzzled eyes rested as I stood at the top of the stairs she was waiting to descend.

'Well,' she said, with a smile that triumphantly challenged criticism.

'You look like a queen,' I said. 'Are those real pearls in your hair?'

'They are heirlooms in my mother's family,' she answered loftily, 'and they were taken from one of Queen Mary Stuart's black velvet caps. Do you suppose my royal ancestress wore sham jewels?'

'I did not know you were descended from Mary Stuart,' I said, gazing reverently on the pearls, and remembering, as I took them into consideration with the red plaits, that Mary the beautiful and unfortunate was said to have had hair of a similar colour.

'I am not given to boasting,' said Helen modestly, 'and why should I brag of royal blood while I am in the service of a Manchester warehouseman? Do you see nothing worthy of your notice but my pearls, Miss Plunkett?'

'You have a different colour in your face,' I said, speaking out part of my bewildered thought, 'and your eyes look strange.'

'Be quick and get dressed for tea if you don't want to be late,' said the inheritress of royal pearls in a voice as sharply unrefined as the olden-time Mary Ellen Kelly's. 'Why on earth can't you get ready for things in decent time like other people?'

'Because other people won't let me,' was my own vulgar retort as I hurried away to Morgan, only then released from Miss Bratton's dressing-room.

Miss Bratton had of late claimed as her own the time Morgan once reserved for me, and though Morgan had resisted this claim at first, Miss Bratton was victorious.

'If I did not dress her she would make me go away,' said Morgan when the struggle was over, 'and if I was to go away it would not be good for you, Miss Plunkett, my dear.'

I thought it would be very bad, and begged my now very dear Morgan to do anything Miss Bratton wished rather than go away.

Morgan did the little all in her power for me that evening with an air of affectionate melancholy that deepened my depression.

'It is all the same in the hundred years,' said this well-meaning comforter as she fastened white roses on the same blue frock worn the first evening I had spent at Bryn Hall, 'and the new clothes do not make us happy in our graves.'

In the hall I met Eugene, as I had met him that first evening; but instead of smiling as he had smiled then, Eugene now held out his hand with a sigh.

Eugene was very sorry for me in those days, but he only expressed his sympathy when we were alone, and then with the low-voiced nervousness of a good child fearful of speaking to a bad one in disgrace.

'Dear cousin,' he sighed, 'I would so joyfully buy beautiful things for you with my own money, but papa forbids me to treat you as my sister. It is not my fault, and I am very miserable.'

And I went on to mingle with Uncle Pepper's smart guests none the less miserable because I had no one but myself to blame for my shabbiness.

'Doesn't this child look sweet?' asked the Vicar's wife of the man beside her and me.

'She has on a sweet blue frock,' answered John Westropp.

I might have suspected sarcasm, but the Vicar's wife was never sarcastic, and John Westropp never teased me now.

'It is very old and very plain,' I said, with humble eyes on my unadorned skirt.

The Vicar's wife had only time to give me one of her heart-warming hand-squeezes before her attention was claimed elsewhere, and John Westropp alone was left to answer me.

'I like plain old gowns on pretty young girls.'

It was the first time I had any reason to suppose that I was considered pretty by the ugly man who had lately seemed to me the best judge of beauty and all other created things, and the young heart under the old bodice bounded with a wilder joy than I had ever known when Eugene called me beautiful.

Just then the gong sounded, and Miss Bratton informed the company with queenly condescension that the meal to which it summoned was a picnic tea, at which there was to be no form or ceremony whatever.

Then followed a merrily promiscuous pairing off, and a delightfully disorderly procession to the dining-room.

'As ill-sorted couples are the order of the evening, I suppose Beauty and the Beast may go together,' said John Westropp, offering me his arm.

The free - and - easy hospitality that prevailed among the Lancashire settlers at Llandhul made any exact calculation of expected guests impossible.

'I hope you won't object to Tom. He thinks because he is going to business next week that he is

old enough to go to parties, and he wouldn't be left at home to-night.'

'Florrie got into such a state of mind when her sisters were dressing that none of us got a moment's peace till I said she might come. After all, it is hard for the child to be left out of everything when she is a head taller than I am myself, and I knew you wouldn't mind.'

Apologies of this kind were never surprising to a Llandhul entertainer, and Uncle Pepper's house-keeper had in her wisdom made preparations beyond the limits of his invitations.

'Rosamund, my dear, go and give those big babies their tea,' said Miss Bratton, waving her commanding hand towards the overflow of grinning hobbledehoyes and giggling hoydens rushing to a side-table. 'Mr. Westropp, there is room for you here,' and she indicated a place at her own right hand.

'Thanks,' said Mr. Westropp, 'but I must really help Miss Plunkett with her nursery tea.'

And he passed on with me to the humbler place, where he was demonstratively welcomed.

'Hadn't we glorious fun at tea that night?'

Often in the after-time this question was put to me by one or other of that side-table company, and I as often answered that the fun had indeed been glorious.

To any sane mind the best of those tea-table jokes would seem bad, but there were no sane minds at that side-table, and of all minds mine was the most insane.

So we all went into fits of laughter over the riddle about Adam and Eve being like washerwomen

because they were 'so 'appy'; and we were violently convulsed when Phil Goodman advised Mr. Westropp to take plenty of Pears' soap to sea with him so that in case of shipwreck he could 'wash himself ashore.'

Yes, no doubt the wit was as weak as the tea Miss Bratton had in her economy provided for that side-table company, but the most brilliant prize joke could not make me laugh now as I laughed then.

When we returned with partially-recovered senses to the drawing-room, Uncle Pepper, according to Miss Bratton's arrangement, gave us Hamlet's most familiar soliloquy.

The guests, as in courtesy bound, applauded the host's performance, and demanded more Shakespearian sentiments, but Uncle Pepper preferred making a few remarks of his own.

It was fashionable, he believed, to have a theory about Hamlet, and he had a theory as well as his neighbours. Hamlet, in his opinion, was not a mad young man, but a bad young man, and the story of his father's ghost was trumped up for the purpose of breaking off an engagement with an amiable and accomplished young woman, and making impertinent behaviour to elders seem excusable.

No one ever contradicted Mr. Pepper Smith's opinions but the Vicar, who had not yet appeared on the scene, and John Westropp, who did not seem disposed for argument, so that the advancement of a somewhat startling theory provoked no particular discussion.

The senior curate ventured to express a mild astonishment at the edifying nature of such an undesirable young man's remarks. He—the senior

curate—had never read the works of Shakespeare. He considered the study hours of a clergyman too precious to be wasted on such frivolous things as plays, but in the selection so admirably rendered by our hospitable friend he had been impressed by what he would go so far as to call the Scriptural tone of Hamlet's sentiments.

'My dear fellow,' said our hospitable friend, with the affable smile he was wont to shed on the younger sons of Levi, 'you must surely remember that even a more undesirable character than Hamlet could on occasion be Scriptural.'

In the quadrille that followed, Miss Bratton danced with Mr. Westropp, while I and Phil Goodman made a side couple in the same set.

'She looks stunning to-night,' said Phil, with his little weak eyes on the regally-moving form, 'but, I say, isn't there a bit of make-up?'

'I don't know what you mean,' I said, with perfect truth.

'Oh, come now,' said Phil, with an agitation of one small eye more expressive than refined, 'that won't wash.'

'I don't understand your slang,' I said, with the lofty contempt that a girl of seventeen or eighteen always thinks herself justified in showing to a boy of her own age; 'but if you think I know what you mean by "make-up," you are mistaken.'

'And do you mean to say you don't know about the stuff girls put in their eyes, and the other stuff they put on their cheek bones?' asked Phil, with some contempt in his own would-be-man-of-the-world voice.

'I don't know about any stuff but the silly stuff boys like you talk,' I answered, with my most magnificent air of womanly scorn.

'Long may you continue innocent, my child,' said Phil paternally. 'I don't believe in make-up myself, and I wouldn't marry a girl with a bit of it about her. When a girl makes up it looks as if she was so jolly anxious to please fellows. Now, the girl for my money is the jolly independent girl, who looks at a fellow as much as to say, "Here I am, with my face as the Lord made it, and I don't care a hang what you think of me." But I am not everybody,' admitted Phil condescendingly, 'and I know some fellows think it complimentary of the girls to make up for them. Westropp looks as if he approved of Miss Bratton, don't he? and they don't look half bad together, do they? She is such a rattling good figure, and Westropp is a well-set-up fellow. Westropp isn't exactly what may be called handsome, but there is no taking him for anything but a gentleman. The fellows here ain't all exactly gentlemen,' and the Archdeacon's son surveyed certain young cotton-brokers and warehousemen, 'but Westropp is the genuine article. I say, it looks like a case, don't it? and they would be a jolly pair, wouldn't they?'

I did not say anything, but I thought all the jollity would be gone out of my life if John Westropp paired with Helen Bratton.

When the dance was over it was announced that Miss Bratton was about to recite 'The Dream of Eugene Aram.'

With a view to artistic effect, previously arranged,

the gas was lowered, while Miss Bratton stood against a background of palms and ferns, and Eugene Smith, sitting at the piano, played soft dirge-like music.

The general company settled into the reverent silence suitable to the occasion, and the irrepressible hobbledehoys and hoydens went stealthily forth to grin and giggle in the hall.

I wished I, too, might escape from the room, whose atmosphere had become strangely oppressive during the last few minutes, but I saw Uncle Pepper's disapproving eyeglass turned towards the vanishing grinners and gigglers, and I dared not follow them just then. I sat as near to an open door as possible, looking with unwilling admiration on Helen Bratton's unnaturally brilliant colour and abnormally shining eyes. How that bright colour and those shining eyes changed the face I had sometimes thought plain, and what a wonderful thing 'make-up' must be when it could work such a transfiguration!

Holding her regally-tired head erect, Mr. Smith's housekeeper stood before his guests with the dignified repose of a queen waiting to address the subjects assembled to pay her homage, till the soft sad music died away. Then, stretching out an arm of perfect shape and dazzling whiteness, she began the story of Eugene Aram.

Helen Bratton, as I have said, had all the emotional power in elocution that she lacked in music, and I who loved poetry better than music was, in spite of our general antagonism, her most sympathetic listener.

I had been familiar with the poem of 'Eugene Aram' from early childhood, when even as I spelt

my weary way through its many verses I had been strangely attracted by the story of the 'melancholy man' who had told his awful dream to a 'gentle boy,' and who afterwards walked between 'stern-faced men, with gyves upon his wrists.' I did not then know the meaning of 'gyves,' and there was no one near to tell me, but the mystery of them only strengthened the fearful fascination of the rhyme.

To-night Helen Bratton's voice, crying out of the deep of her own hidden meanings, stirred new depths of comprehension within me.

Under the influence of this magical voice I passed with 'Eugene Aram' out of the golden light, where happy school-boys played, into the darkness, where murder could not be hid, and I saw as I had never seen before the great gulf fixed between innocence and guilt. I drew near with Eugene Aram to the spot where the dead man lay, and I felt as I had never felt before the unrest of a guilty soul yearning for peace.

Then, by the magic of the same voice, the dark wood where I was alone with Eugene Aram suddenly changed into the sunny deck of a ship where I was among a crowd of men, and in another moment I would have cried aloud as I had cried when my father was struck dead by the hand of John Darker.

But my senses did not altogether desert me, and in less than a moment I realised the fact that I was not a child of seven on a steerage deck, but a young woman of seventeen on a drawing-room chair. If I wanted to be vulgarly emotional I must go elsewhere, so I quietly slipped through the open door into the hall.

It was empty. The hobbledehoys and hoydens no longer grinned and giggled there. They were, I afterwards heard, appearing before an appreciative kitchen audience in a play called *Hamlet's Pa*, composed for the occasion by Mr. Philip Goodman.

The hall door was open, and in the welcome loneliness of the porch I pressed my hot head against a cold stone pillar and sobbed.

'Rosey, my child, what is the matter?'

It was John Westropp's voice that asked the question, with more tender anxiety than I had ever heard in any voice since Mick died.

'Nothing,' I gasped. 'I was excited by "Eugene Aram"—that's all.'

'Poor child! I did not know that you were so excitable.'

'I don't generally make such a fool of myself,' I said as I scrubbed a wet cheek with the corner of a pocket-handkerchief where my initials were lumpily embroidered, 'but I suppose I feel more than other people about murder, because I saw my father murdered.'

'Don't say that.'

The voice that had been so softly soothing a minute ago now sounded so sharply stern that I was moved to make resentful answer.

'Why should I not say it when it is true? My father was murdered before my eyes when I was seven years old.'

'He was not murdered,' said John Westropp, 'he was killed. There is some distinction between killing and murder, and there is much difference between the deliberate crime of Eugene Aram and the unpremeditated blow struck by John Darker.'

'How did you know his name was John Darker?' I asked, diverted by sudden curiosity from the main argument.

'You ought not to stay out here without a wrap,' said John Westropp, suddenly turning back into the hall. 'Ah, here is what may be called a special providence,' and he took a white wool shawl from a chair. 'I saw Mrs. Lloyd Jones shedding this on her way to the drawing-room, and I know I may make you welcome to the loan of it. Let me wrap it round you. We have had warmer August evenings.'

Something in his manner reminded me of a long-ago day when Mick stood waiting for me at the school door with a shawl, and something in my throat at that moment made any distinct expression of thanks impossible.

'You were asking how I knew the name of the man who had the misfortune to kill your father,' he said, standing beside me with his back to the hall light. 'I say misfortune, because I know how much he felt the misfortune of living afterwards. Now, Rosey, my child, will you forgive me if I don't tell you how I know all this? Will you promise not to ask me again if I tell you that the question pains me more than words can say?'

My mind was puzzled much, but my heart was touched still more.

'Of course, I would not willingly pain any one,' I answered in an unsteady voice. 'I have too often been pained myself.'

'Poor child!' His voice was not much steadier than my own.

'I am afraid it has been a hard world for you since your father died. Tell me, Rosey, has it been very hard?'

'It was not hard while I had Mick,' I answered, trying to control my voice; 'but it has been hard since. No one has ever really cared for me since Mick died.'

My voice broke down as it tried to pronounce the dear name a second time, and once more I leaned against the stony pillar and sobbed.

'For God's sake, Rosey, don't cry like that! Oh, my darling, my darling, don't say no one cares for you while I am alive!'

I cried on, but not against the stony pillar. The August night was dark and damp. Not a star was to be seen in the sky above us, but a new heaven and a new earth had been created for me, and I knew that love was living though Mick was dead.

CHAPTER XVI


'LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM'

I WAS roused from the dream of an unfamiliar heaven by the sound of a familiar earthly voice.

'Lady and gentleman, at the close of my poor performance, permit me to thank you for your courteous attention.'

Helen Bratton made a low sweeping curtsy, and then, slowly rising to her full majestic height, stood looking at us from the lighted hall with her unnaturally glittering eyes. In that first startled moment I would have turned and fled to the ends of the earth—that is to say, I had a vague idea of hiding my confusion among uncle Pepper's cabbages in the kitchen garden.

'Don't go, Rosey,' said John Westropp, holding me fast by the hand. There was no confusion in the face he turned towards Helen Bratton, but a radiance that made it for the moment more beautiful than the face of my beautiful cousin Eugene had ever looked in my eyes. 'Miss Bratton will forgive your premature exit from the drawing-room when she understands that it was caused by a too intense appreciation of her dramatic gift. I am sure, Miss



Bratton, that as an artist you will accept this emotional child's behaviour as the highest compliment she could pay you.'

Helen Bratton made another sweeping curtsy.

'Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett does me too much honour,' she said as she again lifted her crown of plaits and pearls on high. 'Am I to accept your own flight as another tribute, Mr. Westropp? Did my "Eugene Aram" suggest the idea that there was a place of repentance to be found at Bryn Hall? Did you come out here to seek it carefully like Esau?'

A shade passed over the brightness of his face.

'No,' he answered coldly, 'I came here to look for Rosey, and I found her.'

'And I found you both,' said Helen Bratton, with a Mary Ellen Kelly ring in her voice. Then, as if conscious of a relapse into old-time vulgarity, she controlled her next speech into the carefully-refined tone of a later existence. 'As an artist I in my turn must compliment the actors on the artistic effect of the porch scene. I am not sure that Mr. Pepper Smith would have been so appreciative. I am afraid he has not the artistic temperament.'

'Mr. Pepper Smith would not approve of me as Miss Plunkett's lover, if that is what you mean, Miss Bratton,' said John Westropp in a calm, business-like tone, 'and I am not sure that I quite approve of myself in that character. I did not mean to say the words I have just said to her so soon; sometimes I thought I might never say them at all; but I have said them, and I think she forgives me. If you do not forgive me, Rosey, take your hand out of mine.'

I did not take my hand out of his.

'Does she know all she has to forgive?' asked Helen Bratton, drawing near him and speaking in a whisper that was more distinct than a shout.

'No,' said John Westropp, 'and I pray God she never may.'

'Rosamund,' said Miss Bratton in the tone I disliked so much of one in authority over me, 'you had better wash your face before you go back to the drawing-room. You look as if you had been crying, my dear.'

Still John Westropp held my hand.

'Let her stay with me a few minutes longer, please, Miss Bratton. I am not likely to see her alone for at least another month, as I am going home with the Vicar to-night, and leave Llandhul first thing in the morning. I hear the musical curate tuning up for his violin solo. He won't get through it in ten minutes, and I only ask for five. You will be kind, won't you?'

He looked at her with a smile that I thought must be irresistible, but the queenly woman to whom he appealed was as unyielding as Queen Elizabeth might have been to the prayer of a favourite courtier for five minutes' private conversation with a maid of honour who was not a favourite.

'I am Mr. Pepper Smith's hired servant,' she said, with her vastly becoming air of proud humility, 'and I must do the duty expected by my employer even when it obliges me to be the extremely unpleasant third person who is no company.'

'Very well,' he said, with cold gravity, 'there is no reason why you should not hear the few words I have to say. Rosey, my child'—in a changed

voice—'I did not mean to tell you of my love to-night, but I am glad you know it before I go away. I am sorry to leave you, my dear, but I think it is well for you to be left. I may have taken you at a disadvantage by speaking to you of love at a time when you felt a special need of being loved, and you may in a moment of excitement have encouraged me to hope for the love that at a calmer time you may find it impossible to give. I am as much over thirty as you are under twenty. I am as ugly as you are pretty. I feel myself as unworthy of your love as I know myself to be unworthy of the Heaven for which, like other sinful men, I hope. I have no wish to fetter you by the hasty words I spoke to-night. I am bound, but you are free. When I see you again you may perhaps be able to answer me according to my heart's desire. If so, I will do all to make you happy that a man can do who thinks no other man could love you so well. Miss Bratton is right in supposing that Pepper Smith will not readily consent to a marriage between John Westropp and Rosamund Smith Plunkett; but love has removed mountains of opposition before now. God bless you, my only love, and make you happy whether you love me or not.'

And with the light of the third person's glittering eyes full upon him he stooped and kissed me.

'Rosamund,' said Miss Bratton, 'you had better bathe your eyes with eau de cologne. You will find plenty in my room if you have none in your own. Don't mind coming down again if you can't make your face presentable. I will see that you are not disturbed.'

'Ah, now you are really kind,' said John Westropp, holding out his hand to her.

'You may trust me to do a friend's part by Rosamund,' she answered, putting her hand in his with her sweetest smile. 'Now, Mr. Westropp, come back with me to the drawing-room. You know you are to give us "Shamus O'Brien" after the violin solo.'

I did not go to Helen Bratton's room for eau de cologne, but went to my own room, thankful for her permission to stay there with my unpresentable face. I knew there was no fear of disturbance when Helen had promised me security, and that I might safely trust her graceful tact to divert any particular attention from the circumstance of my absence. If Uncle Pepper condescended to miss me from the drawing-room he would probably think I was making merry elsewhere with the hoydens and hobbledoys, and the worst I had to fear was a breakfast-table lecture on the bad manners of young people in general.

Yes, it was kind of Helen Bratton to let me sit alone in the blessed gloom of this August night, and cry as much as I would. I was so deeply touched by this particular kindness that I reproached myself for having resented her general unkindness, and this self-reproach mingling with other feelings helped to keep my face unpresentable.

'Oh, Mick, dear Mick,' I whispered to the beloved spirit that I always loved to fancy near me in the darkness, 'I am happy, though, as you would say, I have a queer way of showing it.'

As I sat in the darkness I saw a great light, in

which many once mysterious things were made clear.

I knew why I had been shocked by the idea of a betrothal to Eugene, and how I had been able to discern between love that was sisterly and love that was not.

I knew why Elaine's middle-aged Lancelot had attracted me more than Angelina's young Edwin.

I knew why my heart had been so full of intelligent sympathy for poor Elaine, and—O blessed light!—I knew how life would have looked to Elaine if Lancelot could have given her the love without which she died.

There was no longer any mystery about 'my own ideal knight.' I had seen his face and called him by his name.

He had called himself ugly. I had been tongue-tied then, but now I would, if I could, tell him how beautiful his ugliness was to me.

He had spoken of the difference in our ages. I wished he only knew how I gloried in his fifteen extra years.

He had called himself unworthy of my love. My soul was filled with desire and longing to tell him how unworthy I felt of his, and with the thought of that unworthiness came the wish to be made worthy.

So doth the Gentle Master of our life school make earthly love a heavenly lesson book.

CHAPTER XVII

A SURGICAL OPERATION

EARLY hours were the rule at Bryn Hall, and even on this festive occasion the house was still soon after midnight.

I was awake in the blissful darkness when the handle of the door was gently turned, and Helen Bratton glided into the room with a lamp in her hand.

She had doffed her queenly velvet and regal pearls, but was a no less picturesque figure with her unbound profusion of red hair falling over her pale blue dressing gown.

‘You foolish child,’ she said, ‘I thought I should find you awake.’

She put her lamp on a small table and sat down by my bed, as Florence Nightingale might have sat down by a Crimean bedside.

‘Helen,’ I said, wondering at her gentleness, ‘you are very kind to me to-night.’

She rose suddenly to her feet and turned the lamp very low.

‘We can see to talk without much light,’ she said ; ‘perhaps the less the better.’

Then sitting down beside me again—

'Rosey, I have something to say to you that you will not think kind. You would not think it kind of an oculist to advise the plucking out of your right eye. You would not think the surgeon kind who found it necessary to cut off your right hand or foot. But, Rosey, my dear, eyes and hands and feet have sometimes to be sacrificed by those who wish to save life. Now, I have come to tell you that you have something more painful to do than the plucking out of an eye or the cutting off of a hand or foot.'

I sat up in my bed and stared at the woman who sat beside it in her ministering angel attitude.

'Oh, Helen, what do you mean?'

'Will you promise not to scream out, or make any kind of disturbance, if I tell you?' she asked in a very low, very clear voice.

'I am not a child,' I answered, all the more impatiently because of an old childish terror creeping over me. 'Tell me what dreadful thing you think I must do.'

She laid one firm hand over the two I had nervously clasped together, and slowly spoke these words—

'You must give up John Westropp.'

I fiercely freed myself from her grasp.

'Never, never, as long as I live. Oh, Helen Bratton, why have you come to say this when I am so happy because he loves me? How can you talk to me about giving him up?'

She passed a strong arm round me, and, holding me tight, whispered in my ear—

'Because you cannot marry the man who killed your father—because John Westropp is John Darker.'

I was for the moment stunned by the shock of

her words, and then I was roused to a new fear of the woman who held me in her horrible embrace.

'Helen,' I gasped, 'I wish you would turn up the lamp again, and, oh, please, go away.'

She loosed her hold of me and made the room lighter.

'You think I am mad or drunk,' she said, returning to my side, and smiling her familiar cold smile. 'My dear, I am perfectly sane, and I have not had anything stronger than claret cup since tea-time. When I saw how many of those devouring young Philistines were upon us, I persuaded Mr. Smith not to have out the champagne. At first he thought my advice inhospitable, but when I pointed out the effect of Master Tom Gill's boots on the drawing-room carpet, he agreed with me that Mrs. Gill needed a hint about leaving Tom at home, and when I drew his attention to Mrs. Gill's disgust with the claret cup, he saw what a practical hint it was. Mrs. Gill is partial to champagne, and she did not appear to appreciate my kind consideration when I told her that I had made the claret cup particularly weak for the benefit of Tom. My dear Rosey, I am speaking the words of truth and soberness when I say that John Westropp who made love to you in the porch of Bryn Hall is John Darker who killed your father on the deck of the *Conqueror*.'

'Oh no, no,' I protested passionately; 'it is quite impossible.'

'It is possible enough to make your marrying him an impossibility,' said Helen, with a decision that fell icily on my hot heart. 'Now, Rosamund, do not make my painful duty more difficult to me

by your wilful blindness. Carry your mind back to the *Conqueror*, and see if there is not some remembrance of him there. You saw the man who killed your father, did you not ?

‘Yes, yes,’ I moaned, ‘but I do not remember his face. I only remember that he wore a blue shirt, and I think all the men on deck had on blue shirts except my father, who wore a red one. But when I first saw Mr. Westropp I thought——’

‘Well, dear, what did you think ?’ asked Helen, gently stroking my hair.

‘I thought,’ I gasped, with my wretched face in my trembling hands, ‘I thought I had seen him somewhere before.’

‘Yes,’ said the now very gentle voice, while a hand as gentle continued to stroke my hair. ‘You, no doubt, remembered his eyes. No one who has once seen John Westropp’s eyes can ever forget them. And then, dear child, did it ever occur to you that he knew something of you before you came to Bryn Hall ?’

I did not answer her, but a cold ray of meaning was beginning to steal over the memory of John Westropp’s sudden confusion when I had expressed surprise at his naming the *Conqueror*.

‘I have cultivated my powers of observation,’ went on Helen, still softly stroking my hair. ‘That was part of my trade as a governess, and when I came to Bryn Hall I found Mr. Westropp’s character a remarkably interesting study. I thought there was a mystery about him, and mystery was always interesting to me. A word unconsciously falling from him now and then gave me the idea that he

had seen you in childhood, and I wondered why there need have been any reticence about such a trifling circumstance as a big man's acquaintance with a small child. I was still wondering when we chanced to shelter that day in his Manchester lodgings. You remember how his landlady, in the innocence of her heart, told of his objection to have the picture of the *Conqueror* in his sight? Well, in that moment the truth flashed on me, and the book unearthed by Mrs. Diggles in her cupboard-clearing operations confirmed my belief. Rosey, my dear, there was a name written in that book—the name of John Darker.'

I kept my miserable silence, and she went on—
'You saw his face when I put the book into his hand at the railway station? You saw how grateful he looked when I assured him you had not seen it open?'

I made no effort to say I had seen all this. If I could have spoken at that moment I think I would only have asked her not to stroke my hair.

'I suppose you remember how he evaded the question of sea voyages the night he told us he was going to New York, and you cannot forget what Mr. Smith said the other morning about helping him at a time of crisis. Do you need any more proof, my dear?'

If I wanted more proof I had it in the miserable memory of John Westropp begging me not to pain him by any questions about his knowledge of John Darker's repentance. I felt only too surely convinced that the ideal knight of my girlish love-dream was really the man in irons of my childish horror. I was only too certain that the John Westropp of

whose love I had lately desired to be made worthy was the John Darker from whom I had once prayed God to keep me a hundred miles away.

‘I do not know,’ Helen Bratton went on in a harder tone, ‘how John Westropp can justify the idea of courting your father’s daughter to his own conscience, or by what means he hopes to persuade your mother’s kinsman, Pepper Smith, to be silent for the sake of letting him marry the wife Pepper Smith desires for his own son; but with Mr. Westropp’s conscience and schemes I have nothing to do. My mission is ended now that I have made your duty clear.’

I lifted my face from my hands, and spoke out the resolve my heart had formed in the silence.

‘I will not give John Westropp up. I do not believe he meant to kill my father, and I am sure he has suffered more in his own mind than either you or I can imagine. I believe as surely that my father would wish me to forgive him as I believe that he is with Christ, who forgave even His murderers. John Westropp is not a murderer,’ and I pleadingly caught the hand she had removed from my head. ‘Oh, Helen, he is not a murderer like Eugene Aram; and if he is unhappy about killing my father, perhaps God means me to comfort him.’

Helen Bratton stood at her full height, and looked at me with scorching scorn.

‘You mean, canting little humbug,’ she cried, clenching her fist as if to strike me—‘Oh, you needn’t be afraid—I could hit you with all my heart, but I am too big to fight with such a poor insect as you. Now, look here, Rosamund Smith Plunkett,

I was never sentimental about my father. He was only a red-nosed old sot, who departed this life by falling down a flight of public-house steps in a Liverpool slum, and I did not pretend to mourn his loss. But he was my father, and if any other man had accidentally or otherwise pushed him down those steps and been responsible for his death, I would have made it my mission to spoil that man's life if the law could not do so. As for marrying that man'—and Helen again scorched me with her scorn—'I would pluck the heart out of my body first.'

'You and I are different,' I murmured feebly as again I hid my face, 'and however mean it may be, I cannot help loving John Westropp.'

Again I felt her hand touching gently my bent head, and again her voice changed.

'You cannot help loving him,' she said softly; 'but you must not let your love sink you into the meanness for which all honest men and true women would despise you. You would live to despise yourself if you married John Westropp knowing him to be John Darker. Yes, Rosey, and John Westropp would despise you if he found you ready to marry him as John Darker. My dear, would he have withheld this knowledge from you if he did not think it would fix a gulf between you that no right-feeling woman could possibly pass? Rosey,' and her arm passed very tenderly round me, 'I know you loved Michael Murphy very much.'

I made no answer. I would make no attempt to tell Helen Bratton how dearly I loved Mick.

'Michael Murphy was a lovable soul,' said Helen

in her softest voice. 'All the time he was at Mrs. Kelly's I never heard him say a harsh word of anybody but John Darker. That was on the night after the trial, when I went downstairs after putting you to bed. Oh, poor little Rosey, how I frightened you that night, but I only wanted a bit of fun, and I was only a silly child myself, don't you know? They were all talking about John Darker's acquittal when I went back to the parlour. John Darker was an inexhaustible subject in Mrs. Kelly's parlour, and at that moment somebody was saying something about hoping that he might never cross your path. I can't remember who said it, or exactly how it was said, but I distinctly remember Michael Murphy's answer — "If I was in my grave," he said, "and knew that black-hearted villain was near the child, I'd rise out of it to come between him and her."'

I was conquered now.

The father recalled from the faint shadowland of childish memory had not seemed to bar the way of my love; but Mick, whose memory would never be dim, must for ever stand between me and John Darker.

'Oh, my poor child,' said Helen Bratton, tightening her tender clasp, 'how cold and white you are! Oh, Rosey, for heaven's sake, don't faint alone here with me in the middle of the night.'

'No,' I said despairingly, 'I am not going to faint. I wish I could faint. I wish I could die.'

CHAPTER XVIII

DEBORAH AND BARAK

BUT I did not die that night. I lived through it, as many others have lived through such nights, to learn how much agony of soul may be endured without any particular bodily suffering. Till the morning light my heart was full of unspeakable pain, but I had not enough headache to excuse me from appearing at the breakfast-table.

‘Rose,’ said Eugene, eyeing the slowly-diminishing toast on my plate, ‘you do not eat with appetite. This is an agreeable tonic.’

He put his own particular marmalade within my reach, and I, unwilling to appear ungracious to any human being interested in me, helped myself to a portion. Then, with a mind far away from marmalade, I struggled through my slice of toast, forgetful of the agreeable tonic, till I heard Uncle Pepper delivering a lecture on the wilful waste that makes woeful want.

‘Rosamund had too many sweets last night,’ said Miss Bratton; ‘the consumption of jam at that side-table was alarming.’

Helen’s eyes and skin looked dull in the morning

light, perhaps by comparison with their strange brilliance of the previous night, but her smile was bright.

Mr. Smith's housekeeper always made a point of appearing cheerful at meals.

'Rose,' said Eugene, following me into the drawing-room, where I had aimlessly wandered after prayers, 'you are paler than I have ever seen you. Are you ill, dear cousin?'

I was generally grateful for the brotherly kindness Eugene was wont to show when we were alone, but this morning all my ordinary emotions were stagnant.

'I am not ill,' I said, mechanically gathering up some dance music scattered the night before; 'I am in rude health.'

'But,' said Eugene, regarding me with troubled eyes, 'you have not your complexion. Oh, Rose, what would you do if you lost your complexion?'

'Live without it, I suppose,' I answered as I attached the Gorilla Quadrilles to their detached cover.

'Oh, Rose,' protested Eugene in soft-voiced horror, 'how can you contemplate life without complexion?'

'As I contemplate life at this moment,' I answered, contemplating the portrait of the gorilla, 'the trifling consideration of complexion does not seem worth taking into account.'

'Rosamund,' said Eugene, with an echo of his father's reproving tone in his voice, 'you cannot be serious when you call complexion a trifle, and as Beauty is a sacred subject to me, I cannot bear to hear it irreverently touched.'

Just then Miss Bratton came in from the garden with the junior curate, who had come by appointment for a morning violin practice with Eugene's pianoforte accompaniment, and there was an end of the conversation, in which I was about as much interested as a merchantman who had lost his one goodly pearl might have been in a childish prattle about glass beads.

Music was not the only bond of sympathy between Eugene and Mr. Reece. The junior curate held advanced High Church views that were always severely snubbed by his vicar, and treated with amiable contempt by his senior colleague.

Eugene's love of the beautiful naturally drew his sympathy towards those who made beauty an essential part of worship, but he carefully concealed his interest in Anglo-Catholic developments from his father, who was more sternly anti-Ritualistic than the Vicar himself.

These two young men, glowing with the fire of secret discipleship, joyfully met together to give vent to their suppressed sentiments. Neither of them ever seemed to think my ignorant silence unsympathetic, and both turned confidently to Miss Bratton for intelligent sympathy.

I had long ceased to wonder at Miss Bratton's adaptability, and when I heard her sighing with Eugene and the junior curate over the weariness of Low Church platitudes, I did not remember with astonishment how she had smiled with Eugene's father and the Vicar at the absurdity of High Church attitudes.

This morning she had in her hand an envelope, out of which she took a photograph.

'I had it from a Liverpool friend. You will understand why I did not show it to you at breakfast-time, Mr. Eugene. Dear Mr. Smith has 'prejudices, and his housekeeper must respect them,' said Helen, with her queenly smile.

The junior curate's eyes flashed with delighted recognition as she put the photo into his hand.

'Father Benedict!' he exclaimed rapturously.

'Father Benedict?' echoed Eugene excitedly; 'oh, please, Recce, let me look!'

Recce was pleased to let him look.

'Rose,' murmured Eugene as he reverently passed on the photo to me, 'is he not beautiful?'

It was the picture of a man in a monastic dress—a young man with large spiritual eyes in a sweet worn face.

'He has a peaceful look,' I said, with the secret yearning of an unrestful heart for the peace of those spiritual eyes. 'Does he preach in that?' I then asked, indicating the monastic garb.

Eugene looked inquiringly at the ever well-informed Miss Bratton.

'Yes, he preaches in that,' she answered, imitating my manner of speech in her usual clever way. 'Have you any objection, Miss Plunkett?'

'No,' I said listlessly. 'I am not interested in the subject, but I thought Eugene objected to a preacher in a black gown, and I suppose the gown in the photo is black.'

'I object to the Geneva gown,' said Eugene, 'but

that is very different from this,' and he touched the photographed garment with a caressing finger.

'Is it?' I asked indifferently.

'Rose,' said Eugene wonderingly, 'do you not know the difference between a Geneva gown and a Benedictine robe?'

'No,' I answered apathetically, 'I know as little about this difference as I knew about the difference between a shop and a warehouse the day your father told me I had much to learn.'

Eugene turned away from me with the wounded look that showed how my discordant words had hurt him, and addressed himself to the harmonious Helen.

'I have read of Father Benedict's monastery in the mountains,' he said, 'and I long to see it. I long to see the beauty of the silent life into which those who, like Sir Percivale, have caught a distant vision of the Holy Grail feel constrained to pass. But'—here Eugene sighed deeply—'papa does not approve of Anglican monasteries, and I must deny myself the holy joy of that pilgrimage.'

'Anyhow, you are not a first-rate walker,' said the equally enthusiastic but more practical curate, 'and there is no train within miles and miles of the monastery. Some fellows walk there, but you are not that sort of fellow, Smith.'

'Father Benedict is coming forth from his mountain solitude to hold a mission at St. Monica's, in Liverpool,' said Miss Bratton, restoring the photo to its envelope. 'You know that lovely new church, Mr. Reece? The friend who sent me this photo is a regular worshipper there, and she gives glowing accounts of the services. Evensong at St. Monica's,

with its lights, and flowers, and music, must be quite a poem. Gregorian music, of course,' and she smiled her own sweetly sympathetic smile at the disciples of Gregory. 'Then imagine a sermon from Father Benedict after such a service!'

'It would be too beautiful,' murmured Eugene, clasping his hands; 'but it is not for us, Reece, it is not for us. You must submit to the Vicar, and I must submit to my father.'

'I feel bound to submit to the authority of those who have spiritual rule over me,' said the junior curate, blushing all over his boyish face, 'but I think that perhaps where only fathers according to the flesh are concerned it might be right—I mean, perhaps it might not be very wrong to resist. What do you think, Miss Bratton?'

The blushing, stammering young Levite raised appealing eyes as to a Mother in Israel, and Helen Bratton answered with clear-voiced solemnity—

'The Voice that said "Honour thy father" was the same that said, "I am come to set a man at variance against his father."'

There was an impressive silence, and then Eugene spoke with hesitation.

'I cannot bear the thought of variance with my father. I am not strong enough yet for what may be holy warfare, but papa is going to a public dinner at Manchester on Wednesday evening, and does not intend returning to Llandhul that night. I might, without vexing him by the knowledge, go to that evensong at St. Monica's and listen to Father Benedict, and you and Rosamund might come too. Oh, dear Miss Bratton, will you not come?'

He looked at her as pleadingly as Barak might have looked at Deborah when he wanted the prophetess to go with him to Kedesd.

'I have a little business in Liverpool next week,' said Helen reflectively, 'and I don't see why it should not be done on Wednesday as well as on any other day.'

So it came to pass that we three steamed out of Llandhul station on the journey that was to be so fateful to two of us.

'There will be a great crush at St. Monica's to-night,' said Miss Bratton, as we were drinking tea at a Bold Street confectioner's, 'and I think, Mr. Eugene, you and Rosamund must go at once if you want good seats. Sometimes on these special occasions there is not even standing room.'

'And you?' asked Eugene.

'I am afraid I cannot go to St. Monica's to-night,' said Helen thoughtfully. 'There is a poor sick woman I want to see before I leave Liverpool. She lives in an ugly back street, and my conscience tells me it will be a higher blessedness to spend the evening there than in beautiful St. Monica's. Rosey, dear, I am speaking of my old nurse Kelly. You remember her, don't you?'

'Oh yes,' I exclaimed, roused from a miserable indifference to the conversation. 'Do take me with you, Helen. I would rather see Mrs. Kelly than hear Father Benedict.'

'No, my dear,' said Miss Bratton in her cold, governess-like tone. 'It is lawful for me to do what I will with my own leisure, but I am not justified in taking Miss Plunkett of Castle Plunkett into the

back streets of Liverpool. Go to St. Monica's with your cousin, and I will meet you at the railway station. Be sure to leave the church directly after the sermon, or you may not be in time for the train. If you missed it, you couldn't get back to Llandhul to-night, don't you know? What fun!' And Miss Helen Bratton laughed the laugh she had laughed one long-ago day in Mr. Malone's school-room.

Eugene looked at her in surprise. He had never heard that particular laugh before, and it seemed to jar on his musical ear.

'It would not be funny for my cousin Rosamund and me to be left in Liverpool all night,' he said in a voice like his father's own. 'It might cause a very serious scandal.'

'Well, I hope you will not seriously scandalise the intensely respectable population of Llandhul, North Wales,' said Miss Bratton, with the same laugh.

'She is generally so harmonious,' said Eugene meditatively as we two walked towards St. Monica's—'she is generally so exquisitely harmonious that any discordant note in her voice is peculiarly painful; but I suppose'—with a deep sigh—'no earthly character is a perfect harmony.'

As I could only have answered him from a heart full of discords, I held my tongue and said nothing.

I need not attempt to describe my first impression of St. Monica's. Those who were never influenced by externals would be impatient of any such description, while those who remember the

first effect of an advanced High Church service on a young mind easily affected by outward and visible signs will understand exactly how St. Monica's lights, and flowers, and incense appealed to mine.

As, according to St. Monica's rules, the men and women sat on different sides of the church, I was separated by an aisle from Eugene, but I was near enough to see the glow on his fair face when the white-robed choir lifted boyish and manly voices in the unison of a grandly simple Gregorian *Magnificat*.

A Sister of Mercy was beside me, softly singing with downcast eyes and clasped hands. There was no glow on her face, but it looked very restful in its cold calm.

Would my restless heart ever find itself in the quiet haven where the waves of human emotion are still?

Did the peace of God only mean the dead calm of this passionless woman's face?

Was there nothing but this cold peace in the heaven for which this Sister of Mercy had chosen a death in life?

Standing on the chancel step in his black monastic robe, with the lighted flower-decked altar behind him and the white-robed choristers on either side, Father Benedict turned his large luminous eyes on the multitude before him, and in a voice of wonderful sweetness gave out his text—'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.'

I saw that Eugene's face was radiant, and that the Sister of Mercy's deathlike calm was unmoved,

but after that moment I looked at them no more while the sweet voice spoke from the chancel.

I saw nothing but the face of the spiritual-eyed preacher that seemed to me like the face of an angel who had come down from the third heaven to speak the words that an earthly saint had not been permitted to utter.

To that third heaven my young imagination was caught up by the sweet voice that told of fadeless flowers blooming by crystal streams in the Kingdom of Love, where eyes once dim with earthly tears were lighted by the glory of the Beatific Vision.

The voice ceased, and I was recalled from the 'Paradise of joy' to the earth, where there was a wide gulf fixed between me and happiness, but it was now an earth illuminated by heavenly hope.

After all, the years of life were not endless, and the awful gulf would be closed by death.

If I could only see John Westropp again and tell him of the hope within me, perhaps he, too, might learn to travel patiently on the separate road till we should walk side by side in the Kingdom of Love, where the shadow of John Darker would for ever flee away.

The last 'amen' had been sung, and the crowded church was emptying, but Eugene and I lingered in our places, both utterly forgetful of Helen Bratton's warning about train time.

Choir and clergy had left the chancel, but Father Benedict moved about the aisles speaking a low word here and there in the eager ear of a devoted disciple.

As he came near Eugene he paused as if attracted by the glowing boyish face, and in another moment Eugene, accepting the invitation in the sweet spiritual eyes, advanced to meet him.

Father Benedict held out his thin white hand with the smile that has often been more persuasive than his sermons, and after a few moments' low converse he and Eugene moved towards the vestry.

Then I, suddenly mindful of Helen Bratton and the train, took courage to follow them.

'Eugene,' I whispered, touching his arm, 'it is time to go.'

Eugene started, as one roused from a dream, and his bright face clouded.

'Oh, I forgot, I forgot!' he said in a low nervous voice, 'and I'm afraid we shall miss our train. Oh, how dreadful, how very dreadful!'

'What is troubling you, my son?' asked Father Benedict, with great pitiful eyes on the boyish face so suddenly changed.

Eugene hurriedly explained the trouble, and Father Benedict heard him with grave interest.

'I am afraid you will miss your train,' he said, moving quickly with us down the aisle to the church door; 'but if you make haste you may be in time. If not, return at once with the lady who is waiting for you at the station, and who will surely not leave Liverpool without you. I know that in the name of the Vicar of St. Monica's I may offer the shelter of the Clergy House to you, my son, and that the ladies will be made welcome at the Sisterhood. You will find me waiting for you here if you come back.'

With hurried thanks we left him and went our

way to Lime Street as fast as a cabby inspired by Eugene's frantic 'Any fare you like if you catch the train' could persuade a jaded horse to speed us.

But we were just one minute too late. Our train was gone, and so was Helen Bratton.

CHAPTER XIX

WOOING AND WINNING

I WAS kindly entertained at the Sisterhood that night, and early next morning I received a note in Eugene's handwriting from the Clergy House.

DEAR COUSIN ROSE—I have had an unrestful night, but am now beginning to feel something of the peace that comes from a right resolve. I thought it would be possible to take you back to Llandhul so long before papa's return from Manchester this evening that all knowledge of our attendance at St. Monica's and of our detention in Liverpool might be withheld from him, but a long converse with Father Benedict in the early morning hours has completely changed my mind. Father Benedict has convinced me that the inner life can never be beautiful while the least shadow of deceit rests on it, and so I go now to Manchester to make a full confession to my dear father. When I have performed this most painful duty I will communicate with you again. Pray remain in your present peaceful retreat till you hear from me. I go in fear and trembling. You know how terrible to me is the thought of my adored father's displeasure, and as you read this I am sure you will pity your unhappy cousin,

EUGENE.

I did pity Eugene, and I did more than this—I honoured him.

I could imagine the agonised shrinking of a heart fearful as it was loving from such a confession to such a father, and I was inspired with a new respect for the soft-skinned, soft-voiced young kinsman who was now willing to endure hardness like a good soldier.

For myself I had no particular fear. The mariner who has just passed through the greatest storm of his life is not greatly concerned about the state of the weather on the land where he mourns the loss of his own treasure-laden vessel, and I, mourning over my great shipwreck, gave little thought to the coming storm of Uncle Pepper's wrath.

I could calmly endure the full weight of that storm if only Eugene could be saved from what to him was so dreadful.

If Uncle Pepper cast me adrift, perhaps I might find refuge in this Sisterhood, with all the peace the Sisters had found in a life devoted to the poor and sick.

'Were you ever restless?' I asked the cold-looking Sister who had been beside me at St. Monica's evensong.

'I was once rebellious,' she answered, with downcast eyes on a piece of coarse linen spread on the table before her.

'And is this life a happy one?' I asked, watching the rapid movement of the scissors in the corpse-like hand.

'It is a busy one,' she said, arranging a portion of work for my idle hands to do.

In the course of the morning I received a telegram from Eugene desiring me to be at the Adelphi Hotel

at one o'clock. So I took a grateful leave of the Sisters, who were not all so cold and still as the first I had seen, and went my way. Eugene was waiting for me at the hotel door, and as he met me I was startled by the change in his face. Not a vestige of its natural pink remained in the skin, and not a shade of their own bright blue was in the eyes.

'Where is your father, and is he very angry?' I asked as we entered the hotel.

'He is waiting for us in a private sitting-room,' said Eugene in a trembling whisper. 'Oh, Rose, he has not spoken to me since I made my confession except to command me to send you the telegram. I had prepared myself for his angry words, but I cannot, oh, I cannot bear his awful silence.'

'Dear Eugene,' I said, touched with real sisterly compassion, 'I think you would have found the ugly burden of deceit even more unbearable.'

'Yes, the truth is beautiful,' he said, smiling with quivering lips.

'Courage is beautiful too,' I said, 'and you have been brave to-day, Eugene.'

His cheeks flushed for a moment with their own pink, but paled again immediately.

'Papa is here,' he said, opening a door with a trembling hand.

Pepper Smith laid down a newspaper on the table beside him and rose from his chair. He looked at me as he had looked when the betrothal question was under discussion, with a look that needed not the emphasis of an eyeglass, and for the first time since that memorable May evening addressed me by my name.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett, what do you expect will be the result of this disgraceful escapade?'

'Dear papa,' pleaded Eugene, standing by my side, 'do not blame my cousin Rose; I alone am to blame—oh, dear papa, have I not already explained that I, and I alone, am to be blamed?'

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett,' repeated my kinsman, for the first time in my memory ignoring his son, 'do you think it is the custom in respectable society to stay out all night as you have done with a young man and without a chaperon?'

'I stayed at the Sisterhood, and Eugene stayed at the Clergy House,' I said, wondering a little at my own freedom from all nervous terror as I looked at Eugene's white quivering face.

'I do not recognise such sisterhoods or clergy houses,' said Pepper Smith. 'As a Conservative Englishman I give the convents and monasteries of the Roman Church all the respect due to time-honoured institutions, but I do not consider the innovations of modern Ritualism respectable. They are part of a system that is an abomination to me, and you will be good enough to leave them entirely out of this discussion. Rosamund Smith Plunkett, your absence from my home last night was an outrage on the respectable society in which your relationship to a respected English merchant has hitherto given you a place, and you can only hope to re-establish your position in that society by leaving the aristocratic name of Plunkett behind you in Liverpool.'

'I do not understand,' I said, looking at my magisterial kinsman in bewilderment.

'Your powers of comprehension were never very remarkable, Miss Plunkett; but I will try to bring my meaning down to their level. If you return to Bryn Hall you must return as Eugene Smith's wife.'

Since the awful night of Helen Bratton's revelation about John Darker I had believed myself insensible to earthly shocks for evermore, but now I felt there was life enough left within me to be startled.

'Oh no, no,' I cried, 'I cannot be Eugene's wife—I cannot be any one's wife—and I have no wish to return to Bryn Hall. Send me as far away from it as you like, and then you and Eugene can be happy together without me.'

'Oh no, dear cousin,' said Eugene, taking my hand in his own trembling one.

'Eugene and I will not be happy together without you,' said Eugene's father, not looking at Eugene, 'because without you we shall not be together.'

Eugene dropped my hand and rushed to his father's side.

Pepper Smith took no notice whatever of the movement, but with his eyes fixed on me spoke with the awful calm of a deep wrath.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett, if you will not return to Bryn Hall as Eugene Smith's wife, Eugene Smith shall not return there. If you will not be my daughter, he shall no more be my son. He shall be as dead to me as if he had never been born. I swear it by the living God.'

Eugene fell on his knees with a cry of agony.

'Oh, papa, my dearest, it cannot be. You cannot

part from me. Have I not loved you above all earthly things? Strike me dead here at your feet if you will. I could bear to die by your dear hand, but I cannot bear to live away from you. Look at me, speak to me ; oh, my father, my father !'

His father did not look at him or speak to him, but the face, still steadily turned to me, was ghastly pale, and the voice that spoke my name again was broken.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett, I have sworn, and I must abide by my oath. It is to you my son must appeal ; it is for you to do with him and me as you will.'

Eugene, still on his knees, turned his white quivering face towards me with a look that must have pierced any heart of flesh.

My heart was not made of stone, and I could only answer that look in one way.

'Eugene, I said, with trembling lips, 'I will be your wife.'

Oh, strange wooing and winning !

My accepted lover, in his first rapture, clung not to me but to his father, and it was not my future husband, but my future father-in-law, who first turned towards me with words of love.

'Come to me, Rosamund,' said Pepper Smith, holding out his hand with tears in his eyes. 'I will be a good father to you, my poor fatherless child.'

Eugene and I were married next morning.

It was not the beautiful wedding of Eugene's dreams. There was no bridal veil, no bridal wreath, and if the morning sunlight pierced the east window of the nearly empty church, its glory fell on

a faded muslin school frock needing to be washed again as it had often been washed before.

There was no beautiful wedding tour. Eugene's great desire now was to shorten the time of separation between himself and the father whose threat of parting from him was long shudderingly remembered, and all places were the same to me.

So we spent all that remained of a rainy August at a Cheshire watering-place that, however remarkable for sanitary merits, has never been called beautiful.

There, on the Monday after our marriage, we read the notice Pepper Smith had sent to the *Liverpool Courier* before he returned to Llandhul—

August 18th, by special license, at St. Peter's Church, Liverpool, Eugene, son of Pepper Smith of Manchester, and Llandhul, North Wales, to Rosamund Smith, daughter of the late Arthur St. George Plunkett of Castle Plunkett, Co. Cork, Ireland. American and Australian papers please copy.

PART III

CHAPTER I

CONTENT

I HAD been married three years, and my little son was two years old.

Helen Bratton was still the real mistress of the house where I was the nominal one. I poured out the tea, but she ordered the dinners, and though I wrote invitations, she selected guests. Servants were engaged and dismissed in the name of Mrs. Eugene Smith, but they came and went at Miss Bratton's will.

I did not think there was anything unnatural in this continuance of her reign over Bryn Hall. I was Eugene's wife, but Eugene was not the master of the house, and it was not for me to dispute the authority that Pepper Smith was justified in committing to his own housekeeper.

When I returned to Bryn Hall after my marriage Miss Bratton made a graceful show of resigning her office, and yielded just as gracefully to her employer's contrary wish.

'I will stay till I have given Mrs. Eugene Smith lessons enough in the housekeeping-made-easy way to make you all independent of me,' she said with her brightest smile.



But Mrs. Eugene Smith must have been a very stupid pupil, as at the end of three years none of us were independent of Miss Bratton.

Llandhul society wondered that she was still Miss Bratton, and the widows and spinsters were more and more given to express this wonder in a way that Miss Bratton liked less and less as time went on.

'Oh, any one can get married,' she said one day, with her favourite shrug—'that is, of course, any one under thirty without a hump on her back.'

And she smiled sweetly on one of her old adversaries who was over forty and slightly deformed.

'Helen,' I said indignantly, when the humiliated one had departed, 'I think it was downright wicked of you to speak to poor Miss Oldham that way.'

'My dear,' said Miss Bratton, who at times addressed me in her governess-like tone, wife and mother though I was, 'you have not yet acquired the repose that ought to stamp the manners of Mrs. Eugene Smith on her "At Home" days. If you had not looked ready to cry when I made that general allusion to age and humps Miss Oldham would have had no reason to suspect any reference to her own particular age and hump. You ought to have looked as serenely unconcerned as if all the women in your drawing-room were young and straight-backed. That is good breeding, don't you know?'

Mr. Pepper Smith's housekeeper had a claim on his gratitude that he was not the man to forget.

Her perfect tact had successfully turned Llandhul

gossip out of a course that would have been offensive to Pepper Smith and injurious to Eugene and me.

She had put in such a quietly unconcerned appearance at Bryn Hall on the night Eugene and I were left behind at Liverpool, and had associated the name of Mr. Smith so naturally with ours, that the servants supposed that she had left us all together, and as Mr. Smith's housekeeper believed in keeping menials at a respectful distance, not even the ever-curious Morgan had presumed to ask whether the master had joined us in Liverpool or we had joined the master at Manchester.

When the news of our marriage was exciting Llandhul society Miss Bratton smiled the quiet smile of the confidential friend to whom the event was not in the least surprising, and her discreetly-dropped hints about a school-girlish fancy for secret engagements and eccentric weddings saved me from anything worse than good-natured ridicule.

When I took my unquestioned place in the respectable society of Llandhul I was only laughed at by the elders for my ungirlish disregard of wedding trousseaux, and grumbled at by the juniors for my unnatural indifference to wedding feasts.

'If you had a soul above cake and fizz yourself, you might have thought of your fellow-creatures who ain't quite supernatural,' said Phil Goodman, speaking for himself and his own familiar friends.

But kind wishes were showered on me by old and young, with the one exception of the Vicar's wife.

I did not know what confidence John Westropp had reposed in her the night before he sailed for New

York, but I remembered how her kind eyes had wandered over to the side-table where he helped me with the 'nursery tea,' and I thought she must have understood more than I then understood myself.

I felt that my marriage with Eugene was a puzzle and a pain to her, and I knew it was because she was too honest-hearted to offer mere lip congratulation that she did not speak to me on the subject.

Our once pleasant intimacy was no more, and though I longed with a great longing to open my heart to a woman I really loved, my lips must be forever closed.

Better let that dear woman think me a heartless coquette who had allowed John Westropp to sail away with a false hope while I was secretly engaged to the son of his rich employer, than let her know that the John Westropp I could not marry was the John Darker who had killed my father, and that the man who was entertained as an honoured guest at Llandhul Vicarage was the man who had been in irons on board the *Conqueror*.

John Westropp I had not seen through those three years of my married life. He did not come near Bryn Hall on his return from New York, and a short time afterwards he left Pepper Smith's Manchester warehouse.

His name was never mentioned in breakfast-table discourse between Pepper Smith and his housekeeper, but other people continued to speak of him long after his visits to Llandhul ceased, and I indirectly heard of a small inheritance in the south of England that had raised him to the position of a landed proprietor.

‘That sort of thing suits that sort of man better than trade,’ said Phil Goodman, who was averse to commercial occupation, and indeed to occupation of any kind ; ‘but I’m awfully sorry such a decent chap is all that way off.’

Mr. Philip Goodman was not addressing himself to me in particular, and as I sat silent among a crowd of talkers, I thought of my childish prayer—

‘Please, God, take me a hundred miles away from John Darker.’

I had believed in the answer to that prayer when I was taken more than a hundred miles away from Liverpool, where John Darker was.

Was it again answered by John Westropp being taken so far away from the place where I now was?

I did not think the question out. I knew that the peace for which I was then striving would be most surely gained by the putting away all thought of the man who had so strongly influenced my life.

There had been a great gulf between John Darker and Arthur Plunkett’s daughter, but between John Westropp and Eugene Smith’s wife was the greater gulf that must not even be crossed by thought.

Furthermore, it seemed necessary for me, in these early days of inner conflict, to abstain from the poetry and romance in which I had once delighted, and which others might safely enjoy. The pale, quiet sister at St. Monica’s did not feed her soul on Tennyson and Charlotte Brontë, and I, remembering the busy movements of her corpse-like hands, wondered if there might not be useful work for those who were not sisters of mercy to do.

There were poor and sick people in Llandhul as well as in Liverpool, and as I made my way among them I found more profitable study than the reading of books.

Many a wholesome lesson I learned from unlettered lips ignorant of their power to teach, and I came to despise my own life-struggle as a poor, mean affair, compared with the brave battling of toiled men and careworn women unconscious of heroism.

I learned to look on the consumptive little tailor who often lost breath over his work, but never lost patience with the wife who drank his wages, as a more pathetically romantic character than Rochester of Charlotte Brontë's novel.

I learned to see nobler poetry in the life of the wrinkled old washerwoman, striving with all her honest might to keep a tribe of orphan grandchildren out of the workhouse, than in the death of Tennyson's fair young Elaine.

Then my little child came to bring me a greater joy than I had dreamed of, and to deepen my sympathy with the mothers of all other little children.

Eugene was very kind to me. It was not in his gentle nature to be otherwise than kind to anybody, and I knew I was only less dear to him than the father who would always hold his own first place in the heart of an exceptional son.

Eugene's father was also kind to me. The father-in-law of the present was often surprisingly different from the Uncle Pepper of the past, and as time moved on I felt more and more assured that

whatever affection he could spare from Eugene and Eugene's child was given to Eugene's wife.

He was the good father that he had promised to be to me, and there was slowly growing in my heart something very like a daughterly love for him.

This might have been a faster and stronger growth if Helen Bratton had not remained at her post in Bryn Hall after my marriage.

Helen may never have deliberately checked any affectionate intercourse between my father-in-law and me, but it certainly did not flow freely in her presence, and she was nearly always present.

Sometimes it almost seemed as if Pepper Smith had learned something of his housekeeper's adaptability.

He would talk severe Charity Organisation talk with her at breakfast, about the wicked folly of giving pence to relieve distress that had not been thoroughly investigated; and five minutes later, when he was alone with me, would put pounds into my hand for the relief of the sick and needy, without a word about investigation.

Sometimes he and Eugene, walking together, would meet me coming from homes brightened by his bounty, and I would tell them how those ready to perish had blessed the name of Pepper Smith.

Then my husband's face would become radiant, and its light would be reflected on the face of my father-in-law, who on our pleasant homeward way would speak words that revealed the real depths of heart-kindness beneath all his superficial pomposity and arrogance.

The female society of Landhul regarded my marriage as a great success.

'What a charming husband you have!' sighed the spinsters.

'What an exceptional father-in-law you've got!' cried the widows.

'What a happy woman you are!' they all sang in chorus.

Was I happy?

Well, perhaps happiness is too big a word for this little world, but in those days I thankfully believed myself to be a contented woman.

Life often gives her lesser gifts with a lavish hand to those who have ceased to make the one great demand, and I was surrounded by many fair and pleasant things in the calm land of content when the first little cloud of a coming storm gathered on Eugene's brow.

CHAPTER II

JOHN WESTROPP'S VISIT

'How do you do, Mrs. Eugene Smith?'

'How do you do, Mr. Westropp?'

'Your little boy is not very like you.'

'No, he is considered more like Eugene.'

These and other ordinary sentences were exchanged between me and the man whose influence on my life had been extraordinary, when we met after the chances and changes of three years.

It is, I suppose, in such an ordinary way that a married woman and her former lover generally speak on the occasion of such a meeting in real life, however differently they may express themselves on the stage.

John Westropp and I had parted with outward and visible emotion on an August night. We met without any apparent emotion on an August day.

Pepper Smith still held his own opinion about a one o'clock dinner, in spite of his generally persuasive housekeeper's arguments against barbarous customs, and we were at the pudding stage of this uncivilised meal when Mr. Westropp was announced.

Morgan, who had survived many a short-lived

generation of fellow-servants, ushered in the once familiar but now strange guest with an expression of pleasure that nothing but an extraordinary surprise could justify on the countenance of one who did not wish to fall below Miss Bratton's standard of a well-bred housemaid.

My father-in-law was, as on most week days, upholding the principle of early dining at a Manchester restaurant, but his two-year-old grandson now made a fourth at the family dinner.

John Westropp greeted his old familiar friends quietly, as if he had parted from them but yesterday, and explained that he was on his way from Holyhead after a Dublin visit when it occurred to him to stop at Llandhul and inquire about the general health at Bryn Hall.

'I shall be at my journey's end just as soon as if I take the next train to Chester,' he said. 'I am bound to wait a couple of hours somewhere, so I thought it might as well be Llandhul.'

Eugene greeted his father's former manager kindly enough, but he did not at the end of these three years give him the effusive welcome that he used to give the family friend after an absence of as many weeks. Eugene was unusually absent-minded that day, and while the visitor and I exchanged our commonplaces at intervals between Miss Bratton's more brilliant discourse, my husband seemed scarcely conscious of that visitor's presence.

Our little Percivale sat by Helen Bratton's side, and she was feeding him with rice and jam when John Westropp came in.

Whatever doubt there might be about Helen

Bratton's general sentiments, there was no doubt about her genuine love for Percivale.

He had been called Percivale not because it was a family name, but because Eugene thought it beautiful spelt in the Tennysonian way. Eugene had inclined to the other knightly name of Galahad, with its still more beautiful significance, until reminded by Miss Bratton that a small boy's name was generally abbreviated, and that 'Gally' would be a less beautiful abbreviation than 'Percy.'

The first day I saw this large woman holding my small baby in her arms there was a look in her face that touched the heart of the new motherhood within me, and as time went on I forgave many pains this same woman had caused me when I saw her own pain as she kept watch with me beside my often suffering child.

The child had a no less extraordinary affection for her, and, now that he was beginning to talk, the name of 'Eggie' was the name most often on his lips.

It was by his own choice that he sat beside her at dinner, and, if tempted to jealousy, I told myself that the woman who constantly gave time and thought to the judicious selection of his food had surely a right to feed him. I remembered that her eyes had been as sleepless as my own, while her hands had been far more capable, on the winter nights when we had watched the great struggle between life and death in that small body, and, as I remembered all this, motherly jealousy was lost in motherly gratitude.

Helen Bratton was always seen at her best when

she was seen with my child, and she was looking that womanly best when she greeted John Westropp that August day.

John Westropp's eyes were on the little child with the tender light that had ever been in them for little children when he and I exchanged the last of the unremarkable sentences recorded at the beginning of this chapter.

As a rule, my son Percivale treated strangers with a discourtesy that was sadly inconsistent with his knightly name, but to this stranger he was particularly gracious.

Percivale was golden-haired and fair-skinned like his father, with eyes of the same blue, but larger and darker lashed, and in the picturesque blue velvet frock chosen for him by Eugene he was, in the eyes of all who loved him, an ideal baby boy.

'Eggie,' he said, turning away from the spoon Helen was holding to his small red mouth, and fixing his big blue eyes on John Westropp, 'Eggie, div man dam.'

Helen Bratton turned a very bright face towards the visitor.

'This is a remarkable instance of love at first sight, Mr. Westropp. Percy has never offered his dearly-beloved jam to mortal man or woman before. No, Percy, darling,' again presenting the spoon to his mouth, 'Mr. Westropp appreciates your generosity, but declines your jam. Eggie has had the meat brought back for the man, and the man does not like jam with meat.'

'Div man dam,' repeated Percy in a voice that was in its own small way as commanding as his

grandfather's own. 'Dam for man,' he persisted, pushing away the spoon and pointing a small forefinger first at the jam-dish and afterwards at the guest he was determined to honour.

'Oh, do give man jam,' pleaded John Westropp, with sparkling eyes. 'If man must eat jelly with roast mutton, why may he not eat jam with roast beef? Please, Miss Bratton, put jam on man's meat off Percy's spoon. Yes, Percy, my boy,' as he began to eat with ostentatious relish, 'there is nothing half so delicious as jammed beef.'

'Dam beef,' echoed the delighted Percy, 'dam beef,' he repeated, drumming with his spoon on his own empty plate, and then by way of variation, 'dam man.'

Helen Bratton laughed a laugh of genuine mirth, in which all but Eugene joined.

'Percy, darling,' he said plaintively, 'don't make that noise. You make papa's head ache.'

And then he sat looking on the little image of himself with dreamily grave eyes till the subject of the jam was exhausted.

'Westropp,' he then said, 'do you consider my little boy like me?'

'Well, rather,' said John Westropp, with soft smiling eyes on the child. 'He is very like you as you are, and still more like you as you were.'

'What do you mean?' asked Eugene in a way that startled us all. His soft voice had never sounded so sharp, and his gentle face had never burned so angrily.

John Westropp looked at him with grave puzzled eyes as he answered.

'I did not mean anything offensive when I said that your boy was more like a younger Eugene than the Eugene I am looking at now.'

'And how do I appear different from what I was when you saw me last?' asked Eugene in the same strangely sharp tone.

'You appear three years older, dear boy,' said John Westropp, with the elder-brotherly smile he had been wont to smile on the young Eugene in the old days.

Eugene did not give back the answering smile of those old days, but sank into silence with a sullen cloud that I had never seen before on his sweet-tempered face.

'Some happy people don't age,' said Helen Bratton, with her brightest smile. 'I really don't think time has written any wrinkles on your brow since I saw you last, Mr. Westropp.'

'Perhaps there was no room for more wrinkles on my brow when you saw it last,' said John Westropp, smiling, 'or perhaps time does not find it easy to write on such a tough skin as mine. That sort of handwriting is more effective on a smooth surface like Eugene's.'

The cloud on Eugene's brow grew darker, and he put his hand to his head.

John Westropp's smile died away.

'Is it one of the nasty old headaches?' he asked compassionately. 'I remember how they used to bother you when you were a boy.'

'It is worse than any headache I had when I was a boy,' said Eugene, covering his face with both hands.

'Then you ought to rest it,' said John Westropp,

rising to go. 'I must call at the Vicarage before I leave Llandhul.'

Helen Bratton rose too.

'If you wait till I put on my bonnet I will walk to the Vicarage with you, Mr. Westropp. I owe Mrs. Lloyd Jones a call.'

I was about to remind her that all calls on Mrs. Lloyd Jones must for the next three months be made under the shadow of St. Winnifred's Cathedral, where she was now in residence with her husband, who had lately been made a canon thereof, but there was a look in Helen's eyes that checked the words on my lips.

Helen appeared in her bonnet after a very short absence, during which Eugene had continued moodily silent, and Percy had entertained our visitor with his own discourse. Helen's bonnet was very becoming. There was a brightness in her eyes that was not owing to belladonna, and a colour in her cheeks that was not due to rouge.

John Westropp and I parted as we had met, with commonplace words.

Did he remember our last parting, when I had left him with Helen in the hall through which they were now passing together?

Well, whether he thought of it or not, Eugene's wife must put it out of her memory.

As I watched them for a moment walking towards the gate, I thought of Phil Goodman's opinion so freely expressed on that August night—'They would make a jolly pair.'

Yes, no doubt they would, and why should the pairing of John Westropp with Helen Bratton concern Eugene Smith's wife?

Eugene still sat moodily silent, and Percy by his side continued to talk.

'Eggie don,' said the now mournful little voice. 'Eggie don-don-don ; ice man don too. All don, all don.'

Eugene suddenly lifted the child on his knee.

'Isn't your own papa nicer than the man who is gone?' he asked, with an earnestness not generally thrown into a question addressed to a two-year-old child.

'Man don, ice man don-don-don,' repeated Percy, apparently unmoved by his father's appeal.

'The man is not nice, and I wish he had never come,' exclaimed Eugene impatiently, putting the child off his knee.

'Oh, Eugene,' I said reproachfully as I took the offended Percivale into my own arms, 'surely you are not jealous of a baby's fancy?'

'Jealous!' cried Eugene irritably. 'How can you be so absurd, Rosamund? Jealousy is ugly, and you ought to know how I hate ugliness. Oh, I hate it, I hate it!' and he covered his face with his hands again.

'Dear Eugene,' I said, with the pity always inspired by any suffering of his sensitive body or mind, 'your head must be very bad. What shall I do for you?'

'Leave me alone,' he muttered, without lifting his head.

Pained and puzzled by the first ungentle words that gentle voice had ever spoken to me, I was leaving the room with Percy in my arms when Eugene sprang to his feet.

'Don't go till you have forgiven me, dear Rose,' he entreated in his own soft voice. 'I was very

rude, and I am very sorry. You must never be rude, my beautiful boy,' and he passed a caressing hand over the baby face ; ' rudeness is very, very ugly.'

'Welly, welly uggy,' repeated Percy, with a decision that made me laugh and Eugene smile.

Helen Bratton was more than an hour away, and the after-dinner gossip Percy's nurse enjoyed with the other servants was unusually prolonged.

I knew the call at the Vicarage had been a mere pretext for accompanying Mr. Westropp, and I supposed they were walking together on quiet sands far away from pier and promenade where trippers congregated.

At last she came walking alone slowly along the gravel path.

'Eggie, Eggie,' cried Percy joyfully, running off the grass, where I had up to that moment been successful in entertaining him.

As I followed him I saw not the flushed and sparkling Helen who had gone forth with John Westropp, but a more haggard Helen than I had ever seen.

'Eggie, Eggie,' cried Percy, holding up two little blue velvet arms. 'Oh, my dee, dee Eggie.'

Her ghastly face quivered.

'Does Percy love Eggie?' she asked in a shaken voice as she stooped to lift him up.

'Percy 'ove Eggie,' said the child, with his blue velvet arms tight round her neck.

'Are you ill, Helen?' I asked, looking with real alarm at the pale trembling woman.

She gave me not a word or a look, but walked slowly into the house with my little child pressed close to her breast.

CHAPTER III

A MIND DISEASED

‘My beautiful boy!’ said Eugene.

‘Booful boy!’ echoed his son Percivale.

We three were together near one of the open windows, through which whatever little air was stirring that warm August day came to us, sweetly scented by the flowers underneath.

I was embroidering the crown of what would have been called a smoking cap, if Eugene had smoked. But tobacco was among the ugly things that Eugene hated, and he only wore embroidered velvet caps because they were beautiful.

This pattern had been designed by Eugene himself, and the blending together of his chosen shades had been particularly pleasant work to me, because its progress had given him particular pleasure. These last few days, however, Eugene’s eyes had been less and less watchful of the work of my hands, and more and more absorbed in the carpet at his feet.

Eugene had been among the select few of Oscar’s Wilde’s first disciples, and our drawing-room had been refurnished on æsthetic principles a considerable

time before High Art furniture became vulgarly fashionable.

The South Kensington carpet on which his eyes now so often rested was in harmony with the neutral-tinted upholstery that replaced the amber satin he no longer thought beautiful.

On this carpet Percy was reviewing an army of wooden soldiers, selecting for special distinction those who had lost their heads in his hard service, when the father suddenly exclaimed, 'My beautiful boy!' and the son, with a headless warrior in each hand, echoed 'Booful boy!'

'Eugene,' said I, pausing in my work, 'now that Percy is beginning to understand the meaning of words, don't you think it would be better not to talk to him about his beauty?'

Eugene answered in the same irritable tone that had struck so strangely on my ear the day of John Westropp's visit.

'I do not think he can too early learn to rejoice in his own glorious inheritance—the best of all human heritages.'

'Oh, Eugene,' I said, constrained to speak as I had never spoken before, 'do not call personal beauty the best heritage. Even a woman ought to reckon some things higher, and a man ought not to take it into account at all.'

Eugene's face flushed as I had only seen it flush once before.

'I suppose John Westropp would agree with you,' he said in the sharp voice of that other memorable day, 'but you and I are not in sympathy now, Rosamund.'

I was about to answer him when I became aware of Helen Bratton's presence.

Doors, like windows, were nearly all open this warm weather, and Helen's movements were never noisy. She was often in the room many minutes before her presence was noticed, and there was nothing unusual in her present appearance, though it annoyed me in an unusual way.

'Come to the garden,' said Eugene, holding out his hand to the boy.

Percy dropped one of his headless soldiers, and put a small hand in his father's.

'Eggie tum too,' he said, casting away the other headless one, and holding out the other small hand to Helen Bratton.

She took it in her large one, and the three went out, leaving me alone with the deserted army.

My heart was cut with a sharp pain.

'My child has only two hands, so, of course, he has not one to spare for his mother,' I thought as I began to collect the scattered soldiers.

I was ashamed of the jealousy for which I had only the other day rebuked Eugene, but shame did not soothe its pain, and when Eugene and Helen returned from the garden, each still holding one of Percy's hands, my heart ached none the less because my husband's face was brighter than when he left me.

He had not found me in sympathy with him that day, but Miss Bratton was ever sympathetic.

After that day Eugene and Helen were often together, sometimes with Percy, sometimes without him, and when I played an evening game of chess—

as I sometimes did—with my father-in-law, who had taught me the game, and was growing satisfied with my progress, Eugene, instead of watching it as of yore, talked confidentially to Miss Bratton in a distant corner of the room.

As this confidential converse was never loud enough to distract the attention of chess players, I had no idea of its nature, but as Eugene's now often cloudy brow was always clearer after these evening talks, I could only suppose that Miss Bratton's voice was soothing to the irritation of mind that was sometimes revealed by an irritable manner.

Had I been a perfect woman I must have rejoiced that anything, even another woman's voice, had such soothing power, but as I was a very imperfect woman I could not be jubilant.

'Eugene,' I said once when we were alone, 'why cannot you talk to me as you talk to Helen Bratton? I know you have a secret trouble, and why may not I, your wife, share it with you, and do my best to help you to bear it?'

He did not seem to find my words soothing, for the gloom on his brow deepened.

'You cannot help me,' he said, with a sigh that was almost a groan, 'and you, my wife, are the last person in the world to whom I would look for the sympathy I now require.'

'I am sorry I am so insufficient.'

I could say no more, for my voice was choked.

He was not roused to loving penitence as on a former day, but looked moodily out on the lawn, where Percy was riding in high glee on Helen Bratton's back.

The window was a western one, and in the strong sunset light I for the first time realised the great change in the face that had so long retained its boyish pink and white.

'Eugene,' I said, forgetting my wounded feelings in a sudden anxiety for him, 'dear Eugene, you are ill.'

He turned away impatiently from the light, and asked in a voice that was likewise impatient—

'Why do you think me ill? Do I look so?'

'You look different,' I said falteringly, regretting what might have been an alarming speech to one who was perhaps shrinking from the thought of illness.

'Oh, you find me different, do you?' he asked in the sharp voice so unlike Eugene's own. 'I am different even in your indifferent eyes.'

'You are different,' I said as steadily as I could speak, 'very different from the Eugene who never spoke an unkind word to me.'

He suddenly caught my hand and kissed it like the Eugene of old times.

'Dear Rose, try to bear with me. I cannot be as unbearable to you as I am to myself.'

'I cannot bear to see you miserable,' I said as the tears I could no longer check fell fast. 'Will you not see a doctor?'

'Do not speak of doctors,' sighed Eugene. 'I have no bodily ailment that a doctor would think worth his attention, and no doctor could heal the disease of my mind.'

'Eugene,' I entreated, 'tell me what ails you.'

'Don't look at me like that,' he said fretfully, turning away. 'You could not sympathise with my

misery because you could not appreciate it. I may in time overcome the great difficulty of speaking to you on a most intensely painful subject, but do not think me very unkind if I ask you not to press for my confidence.'

Chilled to the heart, I left him alone.

Eugene's father had not yet appeared to notice the change in his son's appearance and manner, but Eugene was in those early days of his mysterious misery equal to the effort of appearing comparatively cheerful in his father's company, and Pepper Smith, who had been more devoted to his Manchester warehouse since John Westropp's retirement, was at this particular time engrossed by a special business matter.

Then a change came over the spirit of Eugene's unhappy dream, and in the autumn gloom I had dreaded for him his face became not darker, but brighter.

His strange irritability passed away, and he was the soft-voiced, gentle-mannered Eugene once more.

Sometimes of an evening as we went together to the still favourite high tea, he looked once more like the radiant, rosy, cherub-faced Eugene who had first brought me from the outer darkness into this same inner light.

'Eugene,' I said on one of these occasions, touched by that old memory, 'you look like the young Eugene who gave such kindly welcome to a poor relation nearly four years ago.'

Eugene smiled the old radiant smile.

'Dear Rose of the world, what happiness to hear you say so! Ah, I think I am happy after all, in spite of John Westropp.'

‘Eugene,’ I cried, startled and shocked, ‘what do you mean?’

‘Hush!’ he whispered as we entered the dining-room, ‘I would rather not talk of it even now. It is better to forget it altogether.’

Eugene’s season of brightness was short as the St. Martin’s summer that made that year’s November exceptionally sunny. St. Martin’s summer ended in severe wintry storm, and Eugene relapsed into a second state of misery worse than the first.

When his velvet cap was finished he scarcely gave it a glance, or me a word of thanks. He designed no more of the embroidery patterns in which he had once delighted to exercise his artistic taste, and his beloved music was no more a pleasure to him. But though no new art pattern was designed in the little room he called his studio, and no mass of Mozart or Gounod ever sounded from the adjoining organ room, he spent more and more time alone in those two rooms as the winter days went on.

At our early dinner he ate little, and drank freely of the wine from which he had once altogether abstained.

The sight of his son Percivale seemed to give him more pain than pleasure, and when the child looked his brightest the father looked his darkest.

He grew more and more irritable to me, and even Miss Bratton’s voice seemed to have lost its soothing power.

He avoided all visitors, and the servants missed the gently gracious words that had hitherto made him such a popular young master.

Once when I spoke to him about the hardships

threatening the poor of Llandhul in a winter likely to be exceptionally severe there was none of the once warm sympathy in his response.

'Here is my purse,' he said impatiently, pushing it towards me, 'and any other money I have is at your service, but I think people whose misery can be relieved by money are to be envied rather than pitied.'

Pepper Smith was now beginning to look anxiously at Eugene's changed face, though his own experience of his son's changed temper had yet to come.

It came one Sunday at the end of dinner, when the parlour-maid had put the dessert on the table and left us.

Eugene had eaten even less than usual, and did not touch any of the fruits in which he had once delighted as childishly as his baby son ; but he drank strong Burgundy as he had never yet drank the weakest claret, unmixed with water.

'Eugene,' said his father, after a long, silent, troubled gaze, 'you are not well. What has changed you so much, my boy ?'

Eugene rose angrily from his chair, and spoke his first unloving words to that beloved father.

'For Heaven's sake let me alone. I am miserable enough.' And the once gentle Eugene left the room, shutting the door ungently after him.

Pepper Smith pushed away the plate on which he had absently put grapes, and I turned away from the pain I could not bear to see in his face.

'Miss Bratton,' he said in an agitated voice, 'how long have you noticed a change in my son ?'

Helen Bratton's answer was coldly clear—

'I first noticed a change in Mr. Eugene Smith on the 13th of last August. The date is fixed in my memory because that was the day Mr. Westropp called here on his way from Holyhead.'

'And do you mean to convey,' asked Pepper Smith, with an agitation that was now wrathful— 'do you, Miss Bratton, mean to convey the idea that there is a connection between John Westropp's visit and the only undutiful words my son has spoken to me in the twenty-five years of his life?'

'Dear Mr. Smith,' said Helen in her softest voice, 'it is not with me that you must discuss this painful family matter, but with Mrs. Eugene Smith.'

My father-in-law turned towards me. He asked no question, but there was a stern demand for an answer in his darkened face.

'Eugene has been unhappy since Mr. Westropp's visit,' I said falteringly, 'and I am unhappy because he will not tell me why.'

Eugene's father said nothing, but he raised his gold-rimmed eyeglass with a trembling hand and looked at me with a look that I had never seen since Uncle Pepper had become my father-in-law.

CHAPTER IV

EUGENE'S JOURNEY

FATHER and son did not meet again for several days. The little food that kept Eugene's body and soul together was consumed in one of the two upper rooms where he was now generally shut in, and his father made no comment on his absence from the family circle.

Three times that week Pepper Smith brought the manager of the Manchester warehouse to Bryn Hall for the night, and the two spent most of each evening after tea in the discussion of business matters.

John Westropp's successor was in no way reminding of John Westropp. He was a short-necked, small-eyed, loud-voiced man, who dropped his h's, ate with his knife, called my father-in-law 'Boss' and me 'ma'am,' knew not George Eliot, and esteemed the goods of Manchester greater riches than all the treasures of literature.

Mr. Brown had not read Carlyle, but he was in his own way a hero-worshipper, and to him Pepper Smith was the greatest of men—that is to say, the greatest of Manchester warehousemen.

'Vulgar little toady!' said Helen Bratton on the third evening we had left the two in the dining-room, and were by our own two less congenial selves in the drawing-room. 'How can a sensible man like Mr. Smith swallow such wholesale flattery?'

'Mr. Brown may be vulgar, but he is not a toady,' I answered. 'If he did not honestly admire Mr. Smith he would not be clever enough to flatter him.'

'It is a pity you are not clever enough to make your husband happy,' said Helen, screening her face from the fire with an open *Nineteenth Century*.

'It is a pity you are not kind enough to tell me why he is unhappy,' I retorted, with a heat in my face from which no fire screen could protect me. 'I am sure he long ago gave you the confidence he has always refused me.'

'Mr. Eugene Smith thought me worthy of his confidence,' said Miss Bratton composedly. 'He might think otherwise if I betrayed that confidence even to Mrs. Eugene Smith.'

Then she became absorbed in the *Nineteenth Century*, and there was silence between us for the rest of the evening.

My father-in-law was not accompanied by Mr. Brown on the Thursday evening, but returning home unusually late, went straight to his own room.

On Friday morning Eugene came downstairs for the first time since the Sunday of unhappy memory, and I, going into the breakfast-room a few minutes before breakfast, saw the father and son standing on the hearthrug hand in hand.

Eugene's pale face was tear-stained, and Eugene's father was misty-eyed.

I knew they were reconciled, and I was thankful.

'I am going to London on business for a few days,' said the master of the house as we sat at breakfast. 'Eugene,'—looking at his son,—'what do you think of coming with me? We might go to the Lyceum to-morrow night and see Irving in *Richard III*. I know you would like to see Irving again, and I myself enjoy a historical play.'

Eugene smiled with apparent effort. The name of Irving had lost its once magical sound, and the Lyceum was no longer enchanted ground.

'And then,' continued his father, with a touching anxiety to please him, 'if you have a desire for Sunday theatricals I don't mind for once in my life going with you to a Ritualistic service. Which is the finer show? St. Alban's, Holborn, or All Saints', Margaret Street?'

This extraordinary sacrifice of strictly Protestant principle seemed to touch Eugene with a painfully deep gratitude.

His pale face flushed for a moment with something like its old radiance, but when he spoke he was white to the trembling lips.

'You are very good, far too good to me, and it would be beautiful to go to All Saints', but I don't know about London. It is a sudden idea,' and he put his hand to his head.

'Well, I must be in Manchester early to-day,' said Pepper Smith in a tone not quite so deceitfully business-like as he evidently intended it to be; 'but you need not hurry yourself, dear boy. Follow me to Manchester by the next train if you feel inclined,

and we can either go on to London to-night or to-morrow morning.'

So it was arranged, and after his father's departure Eugene shut himself up in his studio for a couple of hours.

I was by the nursery fire with Percy when Eugene came in to say good-bye.

The nurse was out of the room, and Miss Bratton also happened to be elsewhere, so that he found me alone with the child.

'Are you going, Eugene?' I asked.

'Yes, dear one,' he answered, with all the old tenderness of tone, 'I am going.'

I looked steadfastly into his face. Its soft boyish bloom was gone, but all its old sweetness of expression was there, with something more that I could not define.

'I will go over to the station with you,' I said, putting my hand on the bell to summon Percy's nurse.

'No,' he said, staying my hand and holding it in both his own, 'it is better to part here.'

Remembering his great objection to railway station farewells, I did not press the wish that was strangely strong, considering the short time of his proposed absence, and the many times he had gone to London with his father without my company to Llandhul Station.

Eugene sat down in a chair by the fire and lifted Percy from the hearthrug, where the wooden soldiers were on parade.

'Papa has been very cross to his little boy lately,' he said, stroking the little yellow head—'very, very cross.'

'Welly, welly toss,' repeated Percy, in dutiful agreement with the paternal sentiment.

'But papa will not be cross any more,' said Eugene, looking with a sweet sad smile into the little face so like and yet so unlike his own. 'Dear little Percy's cross papa will be cross no more.'

'Toss no more,' repeated Percy, with a solemn decision that I would have found laughable if I had not been near something different from laughter.

Eugene kissed his little son and put him down among his wooden soldiers again. A tear had fallen on the soft baby skin, and Percy stood for a moment with big wondering blue eyes raised to his father's face.

Then, as if struck with a happy thought, he picked up one of his headless soldiers and put it into his father's hand.

'He thinks you are unhappy,' I said, interpreting the childish action that I thought might not be so clearly understood by a father as by a mother, 'and he wants to comfort you by what he thinks a very precious offering.'

Then the Beauty-loving Eugene kissed the old broken plaything that had been ugly even when it was new and whole, and put it carefully away near his heart.

'Good-bye, dear Rose of the world,' he said, with his arms round me. 'I have made you unhappy, but you have been sweetly patient. When we meet again we shall, through the mercy of God, be happy once more. Forgive me, dear, and pray for me.'

In another moment he was gone.

Percy became once more absorbed in his wooden soldiers, while I, in a distant corner of the room, struggled against a weight that tears did not relieve and prayer did not lighten.

At six o'clock that evening Helen Bratton and I were sitting together at the high tea for which one of us had no appetite when we heard the hall door open, and the unmistakable step of the master in the hall.

'Mr. Smith back again! I hope nothing is wrong,' said Miss Bratton calmly, continuing to eat her cutlet.

'Wrong? Oh, surely nothing can be wrong,' I said, with the assurance of one living all day in a vague terror of something wrong.

In another moment my father-in-law was in the room, and he and I asked the same question in the same breath.

'Where is Eugene?'

'Did he not go to Manchester?' I asked, with a sickening of heart as I looked in my father-in-law's face.

'No,' he answered gaspingly. 'I had a telegram from him saying he would not go to London. I was going on alone when I felt a presentiment of something wrong. Oh, my God!'

The cry wrung from the father's heart was all the more awful in sound because Pepper Smith was not wont to take the highest Name lightly on his lips.

Just then a loud knock was heard at the hall door, and Helen Bratton, who had hitherto sat silent, rose to her feet.

'It is Colonel Gunn's knock,' she said, laying her hand on her employer's arm. 'No doubt he is coming for his game of chess, not knowing that you expected to be away this Saturday evening. I am sure you would rather not see him now, dear Mr. Smith, so I will get rid of him for you. Stay here till I come back.'

There was a quiet command in her voice, to which Pepper Smith, in that moment of unusual weakness, yielded without an opposing word.

When she left the room Eugene's father and I spoke no word to each other. He paced the room restlessly, and I stood tremblingly still.

Helen returned with a very white face, and her voice trembled as she spoke to my father-in-law.

'Mr. Smith—dear Mr. Smith—Colonel Gunn is not alone. Two clergymen are with him—our own Vicar and the Dean of St. Winnifred. The Dean has come from St. Winnifred on purpose to bring you some news, and I am afraid—oh, my dear, good friend, I am afraid it is very bad news.'

Pepper Smith rushed out of the room, and I was rushing after him when Helen Bratton laid hold of me, and held me fast in her strong arms.

'Don't go, Rosey,' she said; 'you must not hear the dreadful news yet.'

'I must hear it,' I said, struggling to free myself, and struggling in vain. 'Tell me what it is, Helen.'

'I will tell you, my poor child, if you will stay quietly in my arms,' she said softly.

'I will be quiet,' I panted, 'but not in your arms. Take them off me, Helen Bratton. I can't bear them.'

'Oh, very well,' she said in a suddenly frozen voice, 'if you don't want the news broken gently I will be as brutal as ever you like. This morning your husband went wandering miles away from the home where he has lately been so unhappy, and in the afternoon he was seen rushing breathlessly into St. Winnifred Station. The Llanroch train was coming in, and after looking wildly about him for a moment, he suddenly jumped on the line.'

'And he was killed!' I cried out in agony.

'Yes, he was killed,' said Helen, with cold clearness, 'and we must only hope that the coroner's jury will call his death accidental.'

CHAPTER V

A SETTLED ACCOUNT

I HAVE four old newspapers in my possession. They are so many landmarks in my life's journey.


Three of them are Liverpool papers, and the first of them came into my possession last. It contains the trial of John Darker, who was accused of killing my father on board the *Conqueror*. In the second is the advertisement for my mother's relations that had such fateful results. In the third is the notice of my marriage to Eugene Smith.

The fourth is a Manchester paper. It lies separate from the others, and a little headless wooden soldier is tied to it with a piece of black ribbon.

In that paper there is a paragraph that I can always read without the aid of my bodily eyes.

THE SAD DEATH OF MR. EUGENE SMITH OF LLANDHUL.

The terrible catastrophe, fully reported in another column, will be sincerely mourned throughout Manchester, where the father of the deceased is universally respected, as well as in the Welsh town where the family residence is situated.



Mr. Eugene Smith was a young gentleman of remarkably attractive appearance, singularly winning manners, and exceptionally refined tastes, and his tragic death at the early age of twenty-five has cast a gloom over the society of which he was an ornament.

Mr. Eugene Smith was married about three years ago in St. Peter's Church, Liverpool, to a young Irish lady. The deepest sympathy of all classes of Llandhul society is expressed for the young widow and the bereaved father, who was devotedly attached to his only son.

A pathetic incident reported by our Welsh correspondent is the finding on the body of the deceased a child's broken toy.

When the master of Bryn Hall brought home the poor crushed body after the inquest at St. Winnifred, he shut himself up with his dead, and refused to let me have one look at all that remained to us of Eugene.

I will not try to write of the misery of those days and nights when the sympathy that the newspaper had not exaggerated made no more impression on my heart than the sound of my pleading voice outside the death chamber made on the ear of the father locked in there.

Never was the respect that had once been as the breath of life to Pepper Smith of Bryn Hall so marked as on the day when he took no pleasure in it.

The Lord-Lieutenant of the county sent his carriage to the funeral. The bishop of the diocese, by his own request, took part in the burial service, and the new-made grave was a white mountain of the costliest flowers that Manchester and Liverpool money could buy in December.

Helen Bratton and I were sitting together when Eugene's father returned from Eugene's funeral.

My hands were moving restlessly over the crape surface of the gown in which Helen had attired me, and her eyes were piously fixed on the service for the burial of the dead in the prayer-book open on her own black lap.

I rose and went forward with trembling limbs to meet my father-in-law, but he held up a forbidding hand.

'Sit down,' he said harshly, and I sat down more tremblingly than I had risen up.

'Rosamund Smith,' he said, standing before me, 'where is my son?'

I looked up into the face that a few days of woe had aged more than many years of time, and a new fear fell on me.

'Oh, you know where he is,' I said, trying to speak calmly; 'you know where you have just left him.'

He looked at me with contemptuous haggard eyes.

'Rosamund Smith, I am not mad, so you need have no fear of that kind. I know where my son's body is, but what of that? The poor crushed body I have left in the cemetery is not my son. I want to know where his soul is—the soul that rushed so recklessly into the presence of its God.'

Before I was able to answer him Helen Bratton had stepped to his side.

'Dear Mr. Smith,' she said softly, 'why not accept the general opinion that your son was only rushing across the line to get a ticket for Llanroch. If he

took that long weary walk to St. Winnifred with the sole object of catching the Llanroch train, he must have been extremely excited by the fear of losing it, and he might have lost it if he had crossed the bridge to the ticket office. The train stops such a very few moments at St. Winnifred, don't you know? and we have often seen mad rushes across the line, don't you remember? Dear friend, the coroner's jury had no hesitation in finding a verdict of accidental death.'

'Don't talk to me of coroner's juries,' said Pepper Smith, who was now pacing the room with fierce impatience. 'What did the coroner's jury know about the misery that made my son's life unbearable to him? The coroner's jury did not inquire why my delicate son, who was always extremely sensitive to cold and fatigue, should have walked so many miles on a bitter winter's day for the purpose of travelling by train to an outlandish place, where he did not know a human soul, and where he had no earthly business. Rosamund Smith,' stopping before me again, 'do you think your husband's death was accidental?'

I could find no answer to the question that had made my own sorrow so hopeless in the awful days between Eugene's death and burial.

It was Helen Bratton's voice that broke the stillness.

'Dear friend, even if you have reason for the terrible fear, will you not try to trust "the larger hope"?''

Pepper Smith faced her sternly.

'I don't know of any hope that is larger than the

Bible, and I see no hope there for the sin of self-murder. Oh, my son, my son !'

The acquired tone of dogmatism sank into the groan of the natural man as Eugene's father sank into a chair and covered his face.

Helen Bratton bent over him and softly touched his bowed head. 'Was your love for your son limited?' she asked.

He lifted his haggard face and answered her.

'Helen Bratton, I am not a man given to exaggerated language, and what I say to you now I have said to my Maker. I would have died a thousand bodily deaths to save my son's soul alive.'

'And do you think,' asked Helen in a voice of wondrous sweetness,—'do you think the Heavenly Father's love is narrower than yours?'

'I don't know,' said the earthly father wearily. 'I have always thought such speculations dangerous, and I am too old-fashioned to be easily caught by new-fangled fancies. Your quotation about "the larger hope" is, I think, from Tennyson's poetry, and in my young days we did not take our theology from secular poets; but you may go on quoting Tennyson if you like, Helen Bratton.'

She did not go on quoting Tennyson. She poured out some wine that, with her usual forethought, she had placed ready for his return, and held the glass to his lips.

Pepper Smith drank as obediently as a hospital patient drinks medicine from the hands of a nurse of irresistible will.

'Thank you,' he said; 'I believe I needed it.'

He sat silent for a few moments, and then stood before me again.

‘Rosamund Smith Plunkett,’ he said slowly, ‘the account between us is settled at last. I killed your father, and you have killed my son.’

Again I feared for the sanity of Eugene’s father.

‘John Darker killed my father,’ I said, too much startled by the first accusation to be shocked by the second.

‘Yes,’ said Pepper Smith in the unexcited voice of a perfectly sane man. ‘Yes, Rosamund Smith Plunkett, John Darker killed your father, and I am John Darker.’

CHAPTER VI

THE TRUE STORY OF JOHN DARKER

'I AM John Darker,' repeated my father-in-law as I sat still and speechless. 'I don't care who knows it now, and you, Helen Bratton, are as welcome to the information as Arthur Plunkett's daughter. Perhaps, as you are a woman of such remarkable perception, it is no great surprise to you.'

'I am not greatly surprised,' said Helen Bratton. Then I suddenly found voice.

'Why did you tell me that John Westropp was John Darker?'

'Because I thought so till rather lately,' she answered in a cold, unembarrassed tone, 'and when I had reason to believe myself mistaken, I did not see the necessity of clearing the reputation of a mere acquaintance at the expense of my best friend.'

And she smiled her own sweet smile on the master of Bryn Hall.

If Pepper Smith felt touched by such devotion, he did not at that moment express any sentiment of gratitude.

'I do not know how you could have entertained such an erroneous opinion,' he said indifferently,

'and I have no interest in the inquiry, but if you want the whole truth about John Darker you are at liberty to listen while I tell it to Arthur St. George Plunkett's daughter.'

'Do not tell it yet,' said Helen, going to his side, and bending over him in her ministering angel attitude. 'Wait till you are stronger for the effort.'

Again the object of her solicitude answered without any evidence of grateful emotion.

'Helen Bratton, if I have been strong enough to face the awful reality of death beside my dead son, I am strong enough to talk of my past walk in the vain shadow of life.'

As if to show his strength, he rose from the chair over which the ministering one still bent and took his stand on the hearthrug.

We were in the same room where he had last seen Eugene in life, and he was on the same hearthrug where he and Eugene had stood reconciled after the only estrangement of their lives.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett,' said my father-in-law, addressing me by the old name, in the old tone of magisterial severity, 'when I introduced myself to you as your mother's kinsman I made no false pretence of relationship, and though I am truly John Darker, I am just as truly Pepper Smith. Your grandfather, Bartholomew Smith, and my father were first cousins, and my full name is John Darker Pepper Smith. We Smiths of Northport were very numerous, all thoroughly respectable people of the lower middle class, and all more or less ambitious to rise into the upper middle class from which we had descended.

‘My father and his cousin, Bartholomew Smith, were the most ambitious of the lot, and it is to their constant rivalry that I owe my many Christian names.

‘The kinsman of whom all the Northport Smiths were proud was a rich old Manchester warehouseman, Pepper Smith by name, and Bartholomew’s eldest son was called after that distinguished relative. I was also called Pepper, but the name was only added to John Darker, which was the name of my mother’s grandfather.

‘The Reverend John Darker had in his lifetime been Rector of Northport, and my father taught me early to take pride in the clerical ancestor of whom Bartholomew Smith’s children could not boast.

‘In all other respects Bartholomew’s children had the advantage of me. Bartholomew was at that time a prosperous shopkeeper, who could afford to give his children all the comforts of life, and some of its luxuries. My father, an ill-paid lawyer’s clerk, had a hard struggle to provide his only child with daily bread; while my mother, a delicate, refined woman, was prematurely aged by the life of drudgery for which she was quite unfitted.

‘Bartholomew Smith’s sons went to the most expensive school in the town. I was chiefly educated by an elderly curate, who, in the intervals of frequent bronchial attacks, gave me lessons as part payment for his lodging in our house.

‘The great ambition of my father’s life was to see me a clergyman, and many a winter night, as we sat by the fire my poor mother was obliged to keep low, he would paint glowing pictures of my

future career. He was a good churchman, and revered the clerical office for its own sake, but I think he chiefly desired my ordination because it would exalt me so far above the sons of Bartholomew. These three youths had a contempt for their father's retail trade that was partly natural, and partly acquired by association with school-fellows a grade above them, but they did not aim at anything higher than clerkships in Manchester warehouses or Liverpool cotton offices.

'How I was to get the education necessary for a clergyman was not very clear to my parents or myself, and we could only come to the vague conclusion that I would work my way to college somehow.

'Our lodger, the old curate, had worked his way when he was a warehouse clerk, and my father did not see why I should not do likewise.

'My mother would then proudly prophesy that I would be a rector like her grandfather, while in my own vain imagination I saw myself a bishop.

'We were very intimate with Bartholomew Smith's family. Old Bat, as he was called behind his back, to distinguish him from a son of the same Christian name, was a purse-proud man, and had a way of parading his prosperity that irritated my father, but he always welcomed us to his house with a patronising kindness.

'He was boastful enough to strangers about my mother's genteel family connection, though he affected to treat it with contempt in private argument when my father weighed it against the fortune

Mrs. Bartholomew Smith had brought from a farmhouse.

'He laughed my father's notion of making a clergyman of me to scorn when family matters were privately discussed, but in company he would brag about his cousin's boy who was going into the Church. Young Bat and his brothers called me 'the Parson,' and though nicknames were generally offensive to me, I was not offended by this one.

'In spite of their constant struggle for supremacy, my father and Bartholomew were at heart attached to each other. The Smiths of Northport were all remarkable for cousinly affection.

'Bartholomew Smith was early left a widower, and my mother was much interested in his motherless children, to whom she gave all the little attention she could spare from her own home cares. She was particularly fond of Amelia, the youngest child and only girl, and I do not remember the time when little Milly was not my own heart's delight.

'I was nearer to her in age than any of her brothers, and we were constant companions. She was a beautiful child, always beautifully dressed, and I was a proud boy as we walked hand in hand from church when I was bidden with my parents to one of Bartholomew's fine Sunday dinners.

'I was a very unhappy boy when Amelia went to a Liverpool boarding school, and I counted my own time by her holidays.

'Each half-year she came back taller, handsomer, and more dignified in her carriage. People of her own class thought she held her handsome head too high, but I admired her way of holding her head

even more than I admired the beauty of her face.

‘Bartholomew Smith wished his daughter to be an accomplished young lady, and as I listened to her playing her school pieces on the drawing-room piano, I thought her the most accomplished of young ladies.

‘Amelia was a graceful girl of fifteen, and I was an awkward lad of sixteen, when I made her a declaration of love.

‘Amelia, who had read a great many novels, did not encourage my suit. She informed me that she intended to marry an earl if possible, or, at the very least, a baronet, and that as I would never have a title to offer her, she could give me no hope.

‘I reminded her of my views about holy orders, and confided to her my hope of becoming a lord bishop.

‘At first she was impressed with this idea, but after due reflection she remembered that though a bishop is called “my lord,” a bishop’s wife is not called “my lady.”’

A faint flicker of a smile lighted Pepper Smith’s dark face for a moment.

‘Such memories may seem trifling to-day, but to the early ambition of Amelia Smith and myself I can trace the most serious events of my life, down to the very day that I would to God were my last.

‘I was not altogether cast down by Amelia’s rejection of my suit. I thought her beautiful and accomplished enough for a royal duke, but I was not a novel reader, and I had never heard of an earl

or a baronet taking a wife from the daughters of Northport shopkeepers.

‘I did not think Amelia would refuse me if I were a bishop, and I felt very sure of my bishopric at a time when I was so far from the way that leads to curacy.

‘Amelia had not finished her boarding-school course when her father came to grief. I do not know exactly how it happened. Some people said he had always lived beyond his means, and there was talk about debts contracted by his sons. Trade was depressed that year, and he had lost his late wife’s fortune in a foolish speculation.

‘Bartholomew’s failure was a great blow to all his relations. The Smiths of Northport, however poor, had always prided themselves on their respectability, and they had an old-fashioned notion that a failure in business was disreputable.

‘My father felt the disgrace most keenly. He had always been secretly proud of his kinsman’s prosperity, and he was now deeply humiliated by his downfall.

‘Old Pepper Smith of Manchester, who seldom noticed the Smiths of Northport, was as indignant as any of his poorer relations, and only consented to help Bartholomew out of his distress on condition that he would take himself and his family off to Australia.

‘My father and I went to Liverpool with them, and I thought the world had come to an end when Amelia sailed away.

‘But I had not much time for sentimental regrets. That same year my father died, and I had a hard

struggle for the employment that enabled me to keep my poor mother from utter destitution. At first I applied to old Pepper Smith of Manchester for a situation in his warehouse, but he was still sorely vexed about Bartholomew's failure, and refused point-blank to have any more to do with the Smiths of Northport.

'I got employment in another Manchester warehouse, and as time went on had no reason to be dissatisfied with my prospects, though I gradually gave up my long-cherished hope of becoming a clergyman.

'My mother died just when I had made a comfortable home for her, and her death was a great grief to me. I was much attached to my parents. I think filial affection runs in our family.'

Pepper Smith's last words were indistinct, and his eyes were cast down on the hearthrug where Eugene had stood beside him in loving penitence less than a week ago.

'A year after my mother's death,' he went on, again uplifting his head, 'I married a young Swiss girl who had lodged in our house during my mother's lifetime, and been a great comfort to her in her last illness.

'She was the daughter of a Swiss pasteur, and had come to England to earn her living as a music teacher.

'Eugenie was not in the least like my cousin Amelia, whose equal I never expected to see, but she was a pretty, gentle creature, who made my life pleasant while we were together in our little Manchester home.

'Some time before our child's birth she yearned so much for her native air that I managed by a great effort to take her to Switzerland and leave her under the care of her parents, hoping she would in due time return to me.

'But she never came to England again, though she lived for a year after the child's birth. By her desire the truth was kept from me as long as possible, but at last her father wrote to tell me that she was in a hopeless consumption, and that she longed for my presence, though she was too unselfish to wish for the sacrifice that an indefinitely prolonged absence from my employment would involve.

'Without a moment's hesitation I resolved to go to my wife, and at any cost stay with her to the end.

'I had to give up my situation, with no certain hope of finding another when I returned ; but I had saved a little money, and this, with what I realised from the sale of our household effects, enabled me to give poor Eugenie all that was necessary for the rest of her life.

'I had no anxiety about my own after prospects, and I knew that Eugenie's parents would take care of her child till I could make a way in the world again.

'It was weary living in a place where I had no employment and could not speak the language, and my heart was sad for my poor sick wife, but I had some comfort in my little son.'

Again Pepper Smith's haggard eyes were lowered to the hearthrug where he and his son had last stood hand in hand. Those eyes had been misty on that

day of reconciliation, but they were hard and dry now as he lifted them and looked at me again.

'When my wife's long sufferings came to an end I found it very hard to part from the child, but the thought of him gave me heart for the struggle before me. I found no place for me in the Manchester warehouse where my services had once been considered valuable, and while I was looking for employment elsewhere I happened to see a North-port cousin who had lately received a letter from Bartholomew Smith containing a glowing account of his Australian prosperity.

'Then I suddenly made up my mind to emigrate. I had just about enough money left to pay for a steerage passage to Australia, and I thought Bartholomew Smith would surely be able to find me employment. Besides, I was dazzled like other young men of that day by the prospect of the gold-diggings, and old Bat's letter had boasted of young Bat's luck at Ballarat.

'In another week I was on the sea, but I was shipwrecked on that voyage. I gave devout thanks to Providence when I was rescued by another outward-bound vessel, but I have lived to doubt the mercy of my rescue.

'I and my perishing companions were very kindly treated on board the *Duchess of Cambridge*, and many a poor emigrant gave us a contribution out of his own scanty stock of clothing.

'The most cheerful givers were the Irish, who of their charity clothed me from head to foot.

'I was heartily grateful at the time of rescue for the dry garments of patched corduroy, but I was

dreadfully ashamed of my appearance as I walked through the streets of Adelaide in search of my kinsman, Bartholomew Smith.

‘The Smiths of Northport had always made a strong point of a respectable appearance, and from the time I had first earned money for myself I had been very particular about my dress. I felt irritated by the consciousness that I was an absurd figure in the eyes of strangers whose opinion ought not to have concerned me, and the nearer I approached Bartholomew’s dwelling the more humiliated I felt.

‘But I had no money to buy new clothes, and if I wanted help from Bartholomew I must appear before him as the Irish emigrants had clad me.

‘I had no difficulty in finding my kinsman’s handsome shop. From afar I saw the name of Bartholomew Smith in large gilt letters, and Bartholomew himself was standing at the shop door.

‘Bartholomew had always been an imposing figure, but I had never seen him so magnificent as he looked that day, with a heavy gold chain spread across his white waistcoat.

‘I suppose the chain and waistcoat were more than usually impressive in contrast with my own patched corduroy.

‘He did not know me at first, and looked at me with disgust when I approached him. I was not at all surprised, for I was only too sure that I looked a disgusting object.

‘He was shocked when I made myself known, and did not seem to know whether to ask me into the house or send me out of the street.

‘While he was hesitating a lady and gentleman

on horseback appeared in sight, and my kinsman motioned me to a greater distance from him as they stopped before his door.

‘The lady had a handsome face and a fine figure.

‘Ten years had changed my Cousin Amelia from a slight girl to a splendid woman, but I knew her at a glance.

‘Her companion was a good-looking, well-dressed young man, who had the unmistakable air of a gentleman.

‘They both smiled as if amused by the sight of the ridiculous figure in the patched corduroys. Then the young gentleman’s hand moved towards his pocket, and I moved myself farther away lest I should be insulted, as no Smith of Northport had ever yet been insulted, by the offer of alms.

‘I heard Bartholomew Smith in his most pompous voice advising them to prolong their ride instead of dismounting, as they had evidently intended, and when they rode away again my kinsman beckoned to me with his hand. The Smiths of Northport were all remarkable for their shapely hands, and Bartholomew wore a handsome ring that became him well.

‘I followed him into the parlour behind his fine shop with a feeling of bitter shame that I often repented as a sin in the time to come when I was disgraced as Irish corduroy can never disgrace a man.

‘When we were alone Bartholomew was really kind to me, and showed all a kinsman’s interest in my past trials and future prospects.

'He could, he said, give me employment in his own shop, as he often felt the need of a confidential clerk.

'Young Bat was still at the diggings, and his two brothers had lately joined him, but Bat's luck had changed, and the others had as yet no reason to boast of theirs.

'Old Bat thought I would be wise to stay with him for the present at least, and be the help one of his own sons might be if they were not all good for nothing.

'It seemed my best wisdom to accept his offer, and I did so gratefully.

'Before we had concluded our arrangements my kinsman suggested the desirability of our not, for the present at least, making our relationship public. It would in his opinion be just as well if the other assistants did not know of this relationship. They might consider me a spy, and make the situation unpleasant for me. It would, he thought, be advisable for me to be introduced to them as "Mr. Darker," which was no false name, and a more uncommon one than Smith.

'I had no objection to offer to an idea that seemed reasonable enough, and I did not then see that my kinsman had reasons of his own for not wishing to introduce me as Amelia's cousin to the young gentleman who had taken me for an Irish beggar.

'Bartholomew found me a lodging till I was provided with the clothes necessary to a suitable appearance in his genteel establishment, and then I took my place as his new assistant, Mr. Darker.

'If Amelia ever recognised me as her old play-fellow Jack Smith she made no sign of recognition, and Arthur St. George Plunkett never knew that I was her cousin.

'It was a wonder to most people that handsome Miss Smith was unmarried at five-and-twenty, but I who knew her secret ambition did not wonder. I felt sure that many rich diggers and squatters had laid their fortunes at her feet, but I felt equally sure that Amelia's ambition would not be satisfied with money alone.

'Arthur St. George Plunkett had very little money, and the little he had was fast melting away in the extravagant court he was paying to her; but he was an aristocrat, and Amelia delighted in aristocracy.

'No doubt she would have preferred a titled aristocrat, but hitherto no earls or baronets had fallen in her way.

'My kinsman, Bartholomew Smith, did not openly acknowledge our kinship, but the family feeling for which all the Smiths of Northport were remarkable was too strong to let him treat me exactly as one of his hired servants, and I was admitted to a greater intimacy than any of his other shop assistants enjoyed. Amelia, too, whether aware of our cousinship or not, was more gracious to me than to any of the other young men, who were all more or less aggrieved by the haughty manner of their employer's daughter. Sometimes I thought that my boyish hope of winning Amelia might have been realised even without the bishopric of my boyish dream, only for Arthur St. George Plunkett.

‘On this day, when life seems altogether lighter than vanity itself, I may say that I was then considered a handsome, well-mannered young man, and that I considered myself equal to the general society of any colonial shopkeeper’s drawing-room.

‘But Arthur St. George Plunkett was my superior, and I would not have been a Conservative Smith of Northport if I had not recognised his superiority.

‘It was not his good looks or fine clothes that gave him the advantage of me. Strictly speaking, he was not so well-featured as I was, and when I had the means of dressing according to my own taste I dealt with the same tailor.

‘There was just between us the difference between a middle-class Englishman and an aristocratic Irishman, and it made all the difference in the world to Amelia.

‘There was no formal engagement between them when I appeared on the scene, and it is possible that the Irish aristocrat had no idea of anything more serious than flirtation with the colonial shopkeeper’s daughter, till Amelia, for reasons best known to herself, provoked him to jealousy by her graciousness to me.

‘In those days I took some pride in my voice, and as I had gained some musical knowledge from my late wife, I sang duets with Miss Smith in a way that was pleasing to her and displeasing to Mr. Plunkett.

‘Amelia praised my singing, and did not resent any little hints I ever gave her about improvements in her own playing.

‘I knew now that Amelia was not the musical

genius I had once thought her, and I was guided to an intelligent criticism of her performance by the memory of Eugenie's superior style.

“Confound the counter-skipper's impudence!”

I heard Mr. Plunkett mutter one night to another young man in Amelia's drawing-room who had no connection with counters.

‘The word “counter-skipper” was particularly offensive to me.

‘No doubt Mr. St. George Plunkett, looking down from his aristocratic height on the whole commercial world, would have been vastly amused if he had known how I, who had never been anything higher than a Manchester warehouse clerk, felt my position as a colonial shop-assistant.

‘I do not expect Mr. St. George Plunkett's daughter, who never seemed to be very clear about the difference between a shop and a warehouse, to understand how I felt the humiliation of my descent into the retail trade.

‘You, Helen Bratton, do not belong to the commercial classes, but you are an intelligent woman, and you spent a great part of your life in Liverpool. I think you know all about the degrees of comparison in commercial society.’

‘Yes,’ said Helen Bratton. ‘I know that the least in a cotton-broker's office thinks himself immeasurably superior to the greatest in a linen-draper's shop.’

‘Right,’ said Pepper Smith, with a faint echo of the old approval of his intelligent housekeeper. ‘You at least can see why “counter-skipper” seemed the most offensive of all names to me.

‘Mr. Plunkett of Castle Plunkett was a gentleman, and of course had not calculated on my quickness of hearing when he made his offensive remark.

‘Amelia also had the sharp ears for which the Smiths of Northport were remarkable, and by the proud coldness of her manner to Mr. Plunkett when he advanced to her side I knew that she resented his sneer at me as an insult to her father’s position in life.

‘She was charmingly gracious to me for the rest of the evening, and a mad hope filled my heart.

‘Arthur St. George Plunkett went away in a rage that night, but he returned early next morning, and had a long interview with Amelia Smith.

‘I presume that he then requested her to make a final choice between a counter-skipper and a gentleman of county family, as that same day Bartholomew Smith informed me with much pomp that he had been invited to become the father-in-law of a Plunkett of Castle Plunkett.

‘I did not know how madly I loved Amelia till I knew that she was lost to me. She had never loved me, but I felt her loss more keenly than I had felt the loss of the loving wife who had been in her grave little more than a year.

‘About this time I caught a fever, and when I was recovering the strength that came but slowly I went to stay with some friends who had kindly invited me to their house at the seaside.

‘While there I received a letter from Bartholomew, written in his most magnificent style, informing me that his daughter had made an alliance with the aristocratic house of Plunkett, and that his son-in-

law had obtained a Government appointment at Melbourne, where Mr. and Mrs. St. George Plunkett would in future reside.

‘When I returned to Adelaide, Mr. and Mrs. St. George Plunkett had departed, and I never saw my cousin Amelia again.

‘I settled down again to my work in Bartholomew’s shop with the firm resolve to make the little son I had left in Switzerland my chief thought in life, and in working for him I learned to be content.

‘Bartholomew was liberal to me in the matter of salary, and as he promised me a partnership at the end of five years’ service, I thought I could not do better than continue with him. So I went on from year to year looking forward to the time when I could bring my son out to a comfortable home.

‘I never made any inquiries about Mr. and Mrs. Plunkett, but as Bartholomew boasted less and less about his aristocratic son-in-law as time went on, I concluded that Amelia’s letters were not altogether satisfactory.

‘Once, after long brooding over one of these letters, Amelia’s father informed me that her husband had gone to the diggings, accompanied by his faithful retainer Michael Murphy.

‘Old Bat was not very hopeful about his son-in-law’s luck at the gold-fields, from which his own sons had retired in disgust, but he seemed to find some pleasure in the idea of such an aristocratic accompaniment as a retainer.

‘One fine morning young Bat and his brother Pepper, who had quarrelled with James, returned to their father poorer than when they left him. James

had lately married a rich squatter's daughter, and it was, I believe, this very sensible young woman's refusal to encourage idleness that caused the quarrel.

'The two young men, seeing nothing better to do, pushed themselves into their father's business, about which they had their own ideas of management, and all hope of the partnership promised to me was at an end.

'Old Bat, with a nervous dread of their jealousy, still kept the fact of our relationship secret, and as fifteen years had made even more than the usual difference between a boy of seventeen and a man of thirty-two, they did not recognise me, and if they ever thought of their cousin John Smith of Northport, they were too much engrossed by their own concerns to remember that "Darker" was one of his Christian names.

'However, their ignorance of our relationship had not the intended effect of preventing their jealousy of me, and this jealousy made them extremely offensive; but I bore with them for their poor old father's sake, and did my best to avert the ruin they at last brought on him.

'Old Bat bore his own misfortunes bravely enough, but he lamented my blighted prospects in a way that left me not a word of reproach to cast at him.

'Before we parted, he silently put a letter into my hand. It was from Amelia, who, unconscious of his changed circumstances, wrote to tell of her own failing health and of her loneliness during her husband's long absence, and to ask her father to give her and her child a home.

‘The poor old man had then no home of his own, and I, knowing his love for Amelia, pitied him from my heart.

‘Not long afterwards I saw in a Melbourne paper the death of Amelia, the beloved wife of Arthur St. George Plunkett, and I had bitter thoughts about the man in whose love I did not believe.

‘I daresay I wronged him. I never had reason to believe that Arthur St. George Plunkett was more careless of his wife than he was of himself; but I was unreasonable at that period of my life, and I regarded Amelia’s early death as her husband’s fault rather than his misfortune.

‘I stayed in Australia two years longer, trying various occupations in different places with such discouraging results that at last I resolved to return to England. I could scarcely be worse off in the old country, and I knew that in the matter of health I would be better, as the Australian heat often made me unable for the work I was willing to do.

‘I took a passage in the *Conqueror* that was about to sail from Melbourne, and I was unpleasantly surprised to find Arthur St. George Plunkett among my steerage companions.

“Well, Darker, my boy,” he said when we met, “are you going home to teach music? I hope you will find it more profitable than counter-skipping.”

‘As I could only have answered his pleasantry in a very unpleasant way, I did not answer at all, and I resolved to keep as far from him and his Irish wit as circumstances permitted during the voyage.

‘He was as popular in steerage society as I was unpopular. Arthur St. George Plunkett could afford

to be familiar with those immeasurably beneath him, but I had all the middle-class objection to social intercourse with a class that was just a step below my own.

‘So, while he made merry with the men and waited on the women, I held myself aloof from all, continually brooding over my past disappointments, and thinking scornfully of the man who could treat his own bad luck as a good joke.

‘In those days I was subject to severe headaches, and they were always made worse by my miserable state of mind.

‘One hot day, when I was lying down in my berth with one of these headaches, I worked my mind into the belief that Arthur St. George Plunkett was the cause of all my misery.

‘Only for him I would have won Amelia when I went out to Australia and found her still unmarried. Only for him Amelia would have married me; and if Amelia had been my wife I would have been old Bat’s partner long before young Bat and Pepper turned up to ruin the business. My position as a partner, and Amelia’s influence over her father, would have effectually checked the interference of the worthless brothers, and the firm of Smith and Darker would by this time have been the most respectable and prosperous in Adelaide.

‘Amelia would have been alive and well, a rich stately matron, perhaps the mother of children who would call my son Eugene their brother.

‘Now Amelia was dead, and I was going home a beggar, not knowing when I would see my little son, who depended for his support on the Swiss grandparents who were old and poor.

'Such reflections made the pain of my head unbearable in the close steerage atmosphere, and I thought I would go on deck and try to get a breath of air from the sea.

'On my way to the ship side I accidentally pushed against Plunkett, who was playing quoits.

"Go easy, counter-skipper," he said laughing, "the fishes can wait for their music lesson."

'The laugh and the odious word "counter-skipper" irritated me beyond endurance at a moment when I was distracted by the pain of my head and the thought of my heart.

'I struck him and he fell dead. You were on the spot, Rosamund Smith Plunkett. You saw it all.'

I had seen it all, and as he spoke I saw it all again. I saw the tall man in the red shirt smiling at me before the arm in the blue shirt sleeve was raised to strike the bare white chest.

'They put me in irons,' continued Pepper Smith, 'and though they soon took them off, they could not free my soul from the iron that had entered there.

'I had not a friend among the steerage company, who all mourned for Arthur Plunkett, and no one came near me with a word of pity but one first-class passenger. He was a plain-looking young man, but in those dark days his face looked to me like the face of an angel. He had been an officer in the Royal Engineers, but at the beginning of his military career in New Zealand he was summoned home on urgent family business. He was then about twenty-two years old, and his name was John Westropp.'

Here Miss Bratton interrupted her employer's tale with a question of her own.

'Did you give him a book?'

'Yes,' said Pepper Smith, answering without surprise or any other emotion. 'I gave him a book when we parted. It was all I could do at the time to mark my appreciation of a friend in need. The book was a religious work, that had been prized in my mother's family because it was said to have influenced the mind of her grandfather, John Darker, before he had any thought of entering the Church, and because his name was written on the fly-leaf in his own schoolboy hand.

'I was acquitted by the Liverpool jury, but I could not acquit myself. The God of Truth is my witness that the prospect of hanging was more tolerable to me than the idea of life darkened by the memory of Arthur Plunkett's death.

'I did not intend to kill him, and the blow that I struck in my sudden passion would not have seriously hurt him if he had not been suffering from a heart affection of which I was unaware at the time. But he fell dead under my hand, and though my fellow-men found me guiltless of murder, I accused myself before God as a murderer.

'I suppose it is unfashionable in these latter days to believe in the actual fire of an unhappy future state. I myself am old-fashioned enough to accept literal interpretations of Scripture in a general way; but I am ready to admit that Divine vengeance may possibly be satisfied by the condemnation of human souls to such a place of torment as my own soul made for me.

‘It was John Westropp who saved me from utter despair.

‘He stayed in Liverpool till my trial was over, and did not leave me alone till he had reasoned me into a calmer frame of mind. He reminded me that Divine Justice itself had made a distinction between the murderer and the manslayer, and he urged me to fight like a man with the morbid conscience that, like the old-time Avenger of Blood, would stop my way to the city of refuge built by God.

‘He left me strengthened for the race set before me, and I was prevented from relapsing into an unhealthy state of mind by the immediate necessity of finding work.

‘One day I set off to Birmingham in quest of a situation I had seen advertised, little dreaming what the result of that third-class journey would be.

‘I bought a newspaper at the railway station before starting, and while I was looking over one side of it I became aware that an old man opposite to me was trying to read the other.

‘He was a very shabby old man, and as I concluded that he could not afford to spend a penny on the news he was apparently so anxious to see, I offered him the paper, which he took without a word of thanks or the least apology for interrupting my own reading.

‘As I had nothing else to do I studied the appearance of the old man, who was the only other occupant of the carriage, and I noticed with some surprise that he was reading through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and that his wrinkled hands were remarkably well shaped and well kept.

‘In another moment I knew him.

‘The shabby third-class passenger who saved his pence was none other than my kinsman, old Pepper Smith of Manchester, whose donation of a thousand pounds to a Lancashire charity was reported in the very paper I had thought him too poor to buy.

‘Men do not often change beyond recognition between sixty and eighty, and old Pepper looked very much the same as he had looked on the occasion of our last meeting, but I was very different from the youth who had begged in vain for a small place in his large warehouse nearly twenty years ago.

‘Remembering how bitterly he had resented Bartholomew Smith’s failure, and oppressed with the thought of my own deeper disgrace, I had no intention of making myself known to him.

‘Suddenly, however, he looked up from the paper and asked me what I was staring at, and I was startled into telling him the real reason of my interest in his appearance.

‘He did not express any surprise or pleasure in this unexpected meeting with a relation, but merely asked what business I had in Birmingham.

‘I told him about the situation I had in view, and he said he thought I had better have saved my railway fare.

‘Then he read the paper till we reached our journey’s end, when he returned it to me with the information that he was going to dine at a certain cheap restaurant in a couple of hours’ time, and that if I liked to tell him whether I got the situation or not I might meet him there.

‘I did not get the situation, and as old Pepper looked pleasanter than he had yet looked, I concluded that he was pleased about my disappointment.

‘I was turning away from him with no pleasant feeling when he told me to sit down and eat the shilling dinner he had ordered for me. I was not hungry, but I sat down, and before the meal was over Pepper Smith offered me a situation in his own warehouse.

‘I was surprised and grateful, but before I accepted it I felt bound to tell him the disgraceful truth about John Darker. I could not make my confession in that crowded restaurant, and when I said I had a long story to tell, the old man answered that he could only listen to long stories between tea and bed-time, and that I had better go home with him and tell mine.

‘So I went back to Manchester with him, and spent the night at his shabby house in the same dingy street where he had lodged when he was a struggling clerk.

‘The story I told that night was even longer than I intended it to be, owing to the extraordinary interest old Pepper took in the account of my misplaced affection for my cousin Amelia, and his eager inquiries into every detail of that passage in my life.

‘I afterwards knew that an early disappointment of his own had left an abiding mark on his life and character, and that the slight interest he had felt in me when the fact of our relationship was discovered in the railway carriage became a deeper feeling when he realised what I had suffered through my love for a woman who had not loved me.

‘I was prepared for a storm of indignant rage when I confessed myself guilty of Arthur Plunkett’s death, and I expected old Pepper Smith to rise in his wrath and turn me out of his house when he knew me as John Darker who had been in irons on sea and in a prison on land.

‘But when I had finished my story, to my unspeakable surprise he put out his hand and silently shook mine.

‘Then he lighted me to my room with a tallow candle in a tin candlestick.

“‘Good-night, Pepper, my boy,” he said, shaking hands with me again. “You may bring whatever traps you have in Liverpool here to-morrow. I don’t think old Pepper and young Pepper will get on badly together. And now, my lad, take an old man’s advice. Bury John Darker out of your sight, sink Australia to the bottom of the sea, and make the best of yourself as Pepper Smith from this time forth.”

The idea of so completely severing all connection with the disreputable past had never occurred to me, but I now saw how possible such a severance was.

‘The trial of John Darker had not excited general interest, and it would have no particular meaning to any of my Northport relations who happened to read it.

‘I had not corresponded with my relations while I was in Australia, and as I had not communicated my intention of emigrating to any of them, I did not think it likely that any of them knew of my emigration.

‘The only Smith of Northport who knew that John Darker’s real surname was Smith was old Bartholomew Smith out in Australia, and if Old Bat ever heard of his son-in-law’s unhappy death I felt sure he would, for his own sake and mine, suppress the fact that Amelia’s husband had been killed by Amelia’s cousin.

‘I was profoundly grateful to old Pepper Smith, who had opened the way to respectability, and I was further grateful to him when he sent me to Switzerland at his own expense, with a commission to bring back my boy to live with us both.

‘Old Pepper lived in the same shabby house to the day of his death, but he made many improvements in it for Eugene’s sake, and although he did not pay me very liberally for my services at the warehouse, he spared no expense on my boy.

‘Eugene was a beautiful child’—here Eugene’s father lowered his eyes to the hearthrug—‘and the old man took great pride in his beauty and musical talent.

‘Rosamund Smith Plunkett,’ said my father-in-law, again uplifting his head, ‘I need not tell you what my son was to me. I know he was often sneered at for being so unlike other boys, but I had no wish to see him otherwise than he was. Other boys did not love their fathers as mine loved me, and if it were effeminate to be loving and obedient, I did not wish my son to be manly.

‘Once I was angry with him, and my anger frightened him into an illness.

‘I had so far succeeded in burying John Darker out of my sight, as old Pepper Smith had advised,

that I sometimes forgot that I had ever been anything but Pepper Smith, whose position in a rich kinsman's warehouse was so highly respectable, when one day my son asked me a question that had evidently been puzzling him.

"Papa, why do you always sign yourself Pepper Smith? My grandparents always spoke of you as John, and I thought you also had another name."

'I turned on him so furiously that my poor sensitive boy fled from me in terror. That night he had a feverish attack, and when he recovered it was pitiful to see his nervous dread of offending me again. I reproached myself bitterly for the anger that was even more unreasonable than the sudden passion that had made me a manslayer, and from that time I became as fearful of giving my son pain as he was of giving offence to me.

'Old Pepper Smith died when I had been about three years in his service, and to my intense surprise he left me his sole heir, trusting me to benefit certain other relatives at my own discretion.

'This trust, as all the persons interested can testify, was conscientiously fulfilled by me.

'In my new position I had the opportunity, often longed for, of befriending John Westropp, who had been such a true friend to me.

'We had occasionally corresponded during the last three years, and though his letters dwelt more on my affairs than on his own, I concluded that life had not gone very pleasantly with him since he returned from Australia.

'When I found myself a rich man I wrote begging him to come to me if I could ever be of any

use to him, and at last he came to me for help in his sore distress.

‘He had found family matters very much complicated on his return home, and as he was the only member of the family who had a head for business, all the burden of the management fell on him. He was just beginning to make things straight when he became aware that his father, a country clergyman, had lost heavily by a speculation into which he had been secretly persuaded by an artful adventurer. Part of this money he held in trust for the orphans of a former parishioner, and as he had no means left to make it good, the consequences threatened to be disgraceful.

‘The head of the family, an ill-tempered, free-thinking old general, who lived on the family estate, had been so exasperated with the clergyman for accepting the sacrifice of his son’s military career that he obstinately refused to save the family honour by any help of his own, and he had such a deep-rooted dislike to the clerical profession that he took a savage pleasure in the idea of the family honour being ruined by a clergyman.

‘John Westropp in his desperation came to me for the help that I was only too glad to give him. The lost trust-money only amounted to a few hundred pounds, which I was more than willing to give if John Westropp would accept the gift. But he would only consent to take it as a loan, on condition that I would let him work out the payment in my employment.

‘John Westropp was a gentleman, and he had been an officer. We business men do not look for

remarkable business qualities in the "officer and gentleman" sort of man, and when I gave John Westropp a place in my warehouse I was surprised by the ability he displayed.

'I found it would be as much to my own interest as to his to raise him to a position of trust, and the salary he soon made himself worth enabled him to clear off his debt to me in a few years.

'We were very close friends in those days. I knew that the secret of my past life was safe with him, and it was a relief to talk to him as I could talk to no other human being when the memory of John Darker rose up to disturb the peace of Pepper Smith.

'My constitution had been impaired by the Australian climate, and when I heard of the new Welsh watering-place within a reasonable distance of Manchester, I thought a residence there would suit me.

'So I bought Bryn Hall, and derived great benefit from the sea air, and much satisfaction from the social atmosphere. If no shadow had rested on my life I would not have been content with Llandhul. My natural ambition would have craved a seat in Parliament and aimed at a title, but the ambition of Pepper Smith was checked by the memory of John Darker.

'I dreaded the fierce light that beats on the private life of public men, and a ducal coronet would not have tempted me if it had involved the risk of revelations about the Liverpool trial.

'So I aimed at nothing higher than the eminence of respectability, and the respect I gained in clerical society was especially pleasant to me.

‘Once when I dined at the Vicarage, in company with the Dean of St. Winnifred and a couple of canons, the conversation turned on a notorious prisoner awaiting his trial at Liverpool, and I wondered how the ecclesiastical dignitaries would feel if they knew they were sitting at meat with a man who had once waited for his trial in a Liverpool prison.

‘No one at the table took such a severe view of the Liverpool criminal as I did that night, and even the Dean of St. Winnifred, who is an austere man, condemned my judgment as Pharisaical.

‘I had no objection to be condemned as a Pharisee. The Pharisee was always a man of undoubted respectability, who could never have been supposed to walk in the way of sinners.

‘One day John Westropp drew my attention to the advertisement of Rosamund Smith Plunkett in the *Liverpool Courier*.

“‘You are one of the relations she is looking for,” he said.

‘I thought the matter over for some days, and then I was struck with an idea.

‘Rosamund Smith Plunkett, I need scarcely tell you why it seemed good to me to unite your father’s daughter to my own son.

‘I hope I have made my real character clear enough to show you that I was not the man to live unrepentful of a fellow-man’s death.

‘I might lift up my head with the Pharisee, but I bowed down my heart like the publican.

‘It seemed to me that I might find a surer rest to my soul than I had yet known by taking the

place of a father to the girl I had made fatherless, and my way was marked out in a manner that seemed clearly providential.

‘I could truthfully represent myself as your kinsman, and there was not the smallest probability of your ever discovering the identity of Pepper Smith with John Darker.

‘I supposed you were poor, and I rejoiced in the thought of making you rich. I knew that I need fear no opposition from my son, who had always obeyed me. I thought such a young man could not fail to captivate the fancy of a school-girl, and I looked forward to the time when a child descended from Arthur Plunkett and John Darker would stand between the living and the dead.

‘I had taken so little notice of you on board the *Conqueror* that I had no recollection of your features, but I hoped you would resemble your mother.

‘The first sight of you at Holyhead was a bitter disappointment. I was for the moment stunned by your likeness to the man I had killed for calling me a counter-skipper, and I wondered if I could ever live comfortably with Arthur St. George Plunkett’s living image always before me.

‘But I accepted this perpetual reminder as a Catholic penitent accepts the penance laid on him by his confessor, and I became more reconciled to your appearance when I saw how it pleased Eugene.

‘Rosamund Smith Plunkett, you now understand the reason of my anger when you first refused to become my son’s wife, and my feelings of resentment against John Westropp when I had reason to suppose

that he was the cause of your otherwise unaccountable behaviour.

'When my son came to me that morning with his confession about missing the train to Llandhul after the High Church service in Liverpool the previous night, I seized on the opportunity of effecting what had become the chief purpose of my life.

'As my son and I travelled to Liverpool in the silence that was such torture to him I came to a resolution.

'If you still persisted in rejecting my son, I would take your decision as a sign that atonement could not be made according to my own plan, and that I must expiate my sin in a more painful way.

'If I were not permitted to be a father to the child I had made fatherless, I would make myself childless.

'So when you would not be driven into the marriage by any fear of consequences to yourself, I swore that my son should never return to me without you.

'Rosamund Smith Plunkett, I am not an imaginative man, but at that moment I could imagine how Abraham felt when he had the knife in his hand to slay his son, and when you made your decision your voice sounded like the voice of an angel calling from heaven to stop the sacrifice.

'My heart went out to you as it never went before, and I was prepared to love my son Eugene's wife as I had never loved Arthur Plunkett's daughter.

'When the child was born so like my son and

without the least likeness to your father, I, in the foolishness of my heart, rejoiced in him as a heaven-sent pledge of the Mercy that remembered my sin no more, and my soul was at peace.

‘God forgive me for resting as I did in that false peace! God help me to bear the pain of the rod fashioned by my own device!

‘Rosamund Smith Plunkett, I looked for mercy and I have found justice. I killed your father and you have killed my son.’

CHAPTER VII

HELEN'S CHOICE

WHEN my father-in-law stopped speaking I lifted up my voice in agonised pleading.

‘Do not say I killed your son. I would not willingly have given him a moment’s pain.’

Pepper Smith answered in the same hard steady voice in which he had told the story of John Darker.

‘I do not accuse you of wilful murder, but I hold you accountable for my son’s death, as I hold myself accountable for your father’s death. I did not calculate on the consequences of a hasty blow, and you did not calculate on the consequences of John Westropp’s visit.’

‘Helen Bratton,’ I said, turning imploringly towards the woman who was sitting silent with downcast eyes, ‘will you not speak what you know is the truth, and say no word or look passed between John Westropp and me that could have given offence to my husband?’

She did not raise her eyes to meet mine as she answered in her cold even voice—

‘To an ordinary observer there was no cause for

the evident unhappiness of your husband during Mr. Westropp's visit, but your husband was extremely sensitive, and there is a sort of second sight in sensitive souls. I observed nothing between you and Mr. Westropp but the ordinary courtesy between hostess and guest while I was in the room, but I was out of the room part of the time, don't you know?'

That 'don't you know?' had often irritated my ear, but now it stabbed my heart.

Yes, I knew that she had been out of the room for the few minutes she had taken to dress for her walk with Mr. Westropp, and of course she could not bear the testimony of an ordinary observer to what had been said and looked in the room during those few minutes.

'Do not prolong the discussion,' said Pepper Smith peremptorily. 'My son was made unhappy by John Westropp's visit, and this unhappiness killed him as surely, if not as immediately, as my hand killed your father. As I said before, Rosamund Smith Plunkett, the account between us is settled.'

I rose to my feet and walked to the side of Eugene's father.

My flesh was weak, but my spirit was strong to resist the judgment passed on me.

'The account is not settled in that way,' I said. 'I believe that God has long ago forgiven what caused you so much suffering, and I do not believe that He has made me the avenger of my father's death. Your son's death will be a painful mystery to me to the end of my own life, but I hold myself guiltless in the matter, and in the day when all

things are made clear I know that Eugene will not be my accuser.'

Eugene's father looked at me with the only emotion I had inspired in him that day—contempt.

'If you have such an easy conscience, it is all the more comfortable for yourself,' he said, with cold bitterness. 'I hold my own opinion, but I have no desire for argument, and the few more words I ever wish to say to you will soon be said. I will provide you with the means of making a home for yourself at a distance from me, and will make whatever money settlement you consider sufficient, on condition that you leave my son's child with me.'

Suffering from the shock of Eugene's sudden death, and weighed down by the burden of his father's reproach, I thought I had sunk to the last depth of misery till I was threatened with separation from my child, and the dread of that lower deep gave me strength for another struggle.

'I will not be parted from my child,' I cried passionately. 'I will go as far away from you as you like, but I will take my child with me. He is mine, and you cannot keep him against my will.'

'How do you propose to keep him without money?' asked Pepper Smith.

The dry business-like tone was a more effectual check than the most angry resistance, and I felt my lately revived spirit growing faint as I answered—

'I must earn money to keep myself and him.'

'You may remember,' said Pepper Smith in his effectively dry voice, 'that when the question of bread-earning was discussed on a former occasion your prospects in that way did not look hopeful.'

However, supposing you to be successful in keeping your own body and soul together, do you think you can contrive to keep the life in your delicate child ?'

I had no words to answer him, as I remembered how hard it had sometimes been to keep the life in my baby boy with everything at hand that medical science could suggest or money could buy for the restoration and nourishment of his fragile body.

I had thought of the cold garrets where poverty-stricken widows struggled for existence, and there had been no terror for me in the thought, but I was appalled, as my father-in-law meant me to be, by the idea of transplanting my little child from his warm nursery in the winter-time.

'Name the sum you consider a sufficient income, and it shall be regularly paid to you,' said my conqueror as I stood before him in the silence that confessed defeat.

'I would rather die than live on the money you offer in this way,' I said, speaking in that bitter moment what was the truth, 'and I will accept none from you. I think I shall be able to keep myself from starving, and in time I hope to be able to support my child. When that time comes I will claim him.'

'And I will not dispute your claim,' said my father-in-law, with the indifference of a man who felt he was making a safe promise. 'Meanwhile, you may rest assured that my son's child will be safe with me, and that Miss Bratton will continue her care of him.'

Before I could utter the thought of my burning heart Miss Bratton broke her long silence.

'If you think for a moment, Mr. Smith, you will see how impossible it will be for me to stay in your house when your daughter-in-law leaves it. With Mrs. Eugene Smith in residence my position in your house is respectable, but it would be otherwise if I continued here alone. You, my dear Mr. Smith, know the value of respectability too well to ask a woman as young as I am to sacrifice it even for dear little Percy's sake.'

He looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments, and then said abruptly—

'Stay as my wife.'

Her face flushed and paled, according to its wont at times of sudden emotion. She cast down her eyes and answered him not.

'This is not a time for love-making,' said the man who had so lately laid his beloved son in the grave, 'and I have no love to offer you or any other living woman, but I want to do the best I can for my son's child, and I believe he can have no better care than yours. You are a sensible woman, Helen Bratton, and there are considerations entirely apart from sentimentality that may commend the position I offer to your favour. I do not seek to influence your decision. I merely ask will you go or stay?'

She lifted her downcast eyes and answered—

'I will stay.'

PART IV

CHAPTER I

MR. BARNABAS PLUCKWELL

I LEFT my father-in-law's house on my twenty-first birthday, and this is my twenty-second.

Like a five years' earlier birthday, it finds me in a school just cleared for the Christmas holidays, but a school very different from Thornville of comparatively happy memory.

This school is not situated in a first-rate Dublin suburb, but in a third-rate Liverpool street. Most of the thirty boarders are of the shop shoppy, and none of them have the remotest connection with bishops.

In this atmosphere a digger's daughter and huckster's niece might breathe more freely than in the refined air of Thornville, but with my present power of discernment between greater and lesser evils I think thankfully of my childish purgatory.

On my seventeenth birthday the idea of governessing was presented to my mind in the interesting light of an untried experiment. On my twenty-second birthday I am meditating on a six months' experience of governessing, not because I find

pleasure in looking back, but because I find it more painful to look forward.

It is a year since I parted from my child, and the false hope of making a home for him no longer sustains me.

It was not on governessing that I built this hope, but on the still less sure foundation of literature. Like many young people who find pleasure in reading, I thought it would be pleasant to write, and I held the not uncommon belief that it is easy to write well, till I knew something of the difficulty of writing indifferently. I had gained prizes for school essays, and in my brain were many germs of romance.

With the natural gift of imagination, and the acquired power of composition, I did not see why I need stretch out my hands in vain to fame and fortune.

While I was under the cloud of Pepper Smith's displeasure after my first refusal to marry Eugene, the dream of becoming independent by authorship was especially sweet to me, but after my marriage, when I deemed it unsafe to read romances, I resisted what seemed the still more dangerous temptation to write them.

Once an appalling experience in the course of my district visiting moved me to write a temperance tale. This was accepted by a penny weekly paper, from whose editor I received the sum of twenty-five shillings. Eugene was charmed to see my sentiments in print, but shocked by the vulgarity of a pecuniary recompense, and so plaintively resented the idea of making any artistic gift a marketable

article that I was ashamed of my own pleasure in first earnings. But when I was face to face with what my poor Eugene had once called the vulgar necessity of earning money, the thought of trading with the aforesaid gift did not seem barbaric, and literary gains were sanctified when considered as the means of uniting mother and child.

It was pain and grief to me to part from my child on my own birthday in Christmas week, but my heart did not ache with a hopeless sorrow. My father-in-law had promised not to dispute my claim when the time for claiming my child came, and in my ignorance I felt assured that the time was not far off. In my farewell interview with Pepper Smith he informed me that if I saw any reason to change my mind about choosing death rather than the alternative of an income from him, I would, by making application to Mr. Brown at the Manchester warehouse, receive any reasonable sum I demanded. He was also considerate enough to offer me money for immediate needs, but this I declined. I had still enough left of the allowance made me when I was Eugene's wife to suffice for those needs, and when this little provision was exhausted I hoped to be among the blessed company of well-paid workers.

From Llandhul I went to Liverpool, directing my course there because I had a vague idea that brain-workers should dwell in large towns, and because this large town was so much nearer than London to my child's dwelling-place.

So I took a cheap lodging, and began the life whose most cheerful occupation was the counting of unhatched chickens.

I had been paid twenty-five shillings for that one printed story of mine. I had been more than a fortnight in writing that short story, but only a small portion of my time in those days could be spared to story-writing. Now that I had nothing to do but write stories from morning till night, I ought to be able at the very least to produce two of such stories a week. That would be £2:10s. a week—£130 a year. I had heard of curates and other gentlefolks supporting large families of children on similar sums, and such an income ought surely to enable me to provide for one child, even for my delicate Percy.

Of course I had ambitions above the penny weeklies, and views about shilling and half-crown monthlies, but with a prudence that I thought praiseworthy I resolved to secure my weekly two pounds ten shillings from the penny paper before trying to pick up gold and silver on the higher ground of magazine literature.

I did not find my large leisure so favourable to the manufacture of fiction as I expected, and the story that I intended to write in three days was scarcely finished in ten.

Perhaps I might have made better progress but for something that so often dimmed my eyes and shook my hand. This was the memory of how I had written the last pages of that other story in Eugene's studio, near the door that opened into the room where Eugene, with a face still unclouded by John Westropp's visit, sat at his organ, with Percy, already remarkable for his love of music, standing beside him, silent as the father's playing alone could keep the child.

However, this second story of mine seemed to me of higher merit than the first, and fondly hoping that higher pay might compensate me for the outlay of time, I posted my manuscript, and waited for the first instalment of my income.

I was growing impatient of what seemed to my mind a long delay when the editorial letter came without the expected cheque, and with the intimation that the MS., declined with the editor's best thanks, would be returned to me if I forwarded the necessary number of postage stamps.

This heavy blow stunned me at first, but, remembering the early failures of great authors, I took courage, and sent other stories in different directions.

Some of these were declined with editorial thanks ; others were returned without any such polite accompaniment.

As the months of disappointment went wearily on I grew less and less confident of my own literary powers, and more and more ashamed of the many times I had sat in the seat of the scorner and presumed to pass judgment on what I was now miserably convinced was better work than mine.

Still there were times when, conscientiously considering the stories published in the papers that would have none of mine, I did not think it was altogether an author's vanity that saw superior merit in the rejected ones.

At one of these times I was attracted by an advertisement, 'To amateur authors,' and applying to the given address, I was informed that the said amateur authors, by joining a certain literary society, might secure all the advantages of which the prejudice

of editors and the jealousy of professional rivals had hitherto deprived them.

No amateur author, however talented, said the artfully-worded prospectus of the society, could hope for success while the jealous professional and the prejudiced editor stood in his path like the lion and the bear that David slew, but the 'Rising Sun Literary Society' was prepared to rescue the amateur lamb, and lead it safely into green pastures for the trifling consideration of one guinea.

I made haste to part with one of my few remaining guineas, and received in return a specimen copy of what claimed to be the only magazine where the light of amateur genius could shine before men. I opened it with high expectation, and closed it in deep dejection.

If these sickly rhymes, that were not even correctly measured, and these unhealthy tales that were so freely told, represented average amateur talent, I could see several good reasons for editorial prejudice, and no reason at all for professional jealousy.

Then my sinking heart rose with the thought that as I could certainly produce better work than this, I would at least be sure of employment from the editor of the *Rising Sun Magazine*, who, judging by his strongly-professed contempt for editorial avarice, might naturally be expected to show a bright example of liberality.

So I made some alterations and improvements in one of my many rejected manuscripts, and addressed it to the office of the *Rising Sun*, with a letter that I considered admirably business-like, in

which I requested the editor to come to terms with me about a regular supply of similar stories.

To this letter I received no reply, and the more inquiries I made the more postage stamps I wasted.

One day my weary eyes fell on another advertisement cautioning amateur authors to beware of literary swindles, and advising any literary aspirant who needed honest advice to communicate with Mr. Barnabas Pluckwell, who was about to establish a Liverpool branch of the 'Crescent Moon Publishing Company,' and would for the next few days be happy to call on any amateur who wished for a consultation.

I lost no time in inviting Mr. Pluckwell to call on me, and Mr. Pluckwell promptly responded to my invitation.

He was an amiable-looking old gentleman, with the rosy cheeks and silvery beard of a story-book grandpapa, and I felt a wonderful relief in pouring the dismal tale of my literary failure into his sympathetic ear.

He shook his venerable head with a mournful smile when I mentioned the Rising Sun Society, and assured me that it was for the exposure of such swindles that the Crescent Moon was about to rise and shine.

The Crescent Moon was composed of many burning and shining lights, combined to lighten the darkness of amateur genius, and the power of the Crescent Moon to help the helpless would soon be as boundless as its sympathy.

Mr. Barnabas Pluckwell could see genius in every line of my face, and he felt sure that if I submitted

a specimen of my literary work to him his own long-standing faith in physiognomy would be pleasantly confirmed.

The more Mr. Pluckwell talked—and he talked a great deal—the more happy I felt in the society of such an old gentleman as I had often read about and vainly longed to see—one who had lived and moved among the literary gods held in reverence by me in the days of hero-worshipping youth.

Mr. Pluckwell had dined with Dickens, wined with Thackeray, fished with Charles Kingsley, hunted with Whyte-Melville, and been the guide, philosopher, and friend of lesser literary lights too numerous to mention.

‘Are you a novelist yourself?’ I eagerly asked in one of Mr. Pluckwell’s very few pauses.

The name of Pluckwell was not on the list of my adored authors, but it was probable that my charming old gentleman delighted the reading world under another name.

‘My dear young lady,’ he answered, ‘you are still near enough to your school-days to remember, as I am sorry to say I cannot, the name of the man in English history who was called “the King-maker.” In my own young days I used to wonder why that man did not make himself a king instead of making kings of other men; but I lived to understand him. No, my dear, I am not a novelist myself, but I have been the maker of many novelists. As my dear friend Thackeray said to me one day—but I will not enter into that now. When you and I are the good friends I know we shall soon be you shall have it all, and much more that has never been published about

•

Thackeray and that remarkable bird of his. Of course you have read about the raven he immortalised in *Westward Ho!*

'I have read about the raven that belonged to Dickens,' I said hesitatingly; 'and was not *Westward Ho!* written by Kingsley?'

'Of course it was,' said the venerable Barnabas, with a laugh that proved him in no way offended by my corrections. 'You see, my dear, I always called my literary friends by their Christian names or their nicknames, and that is why their surnames get so mixed in my talk. Upon my soul, I believe it was dear old Walter Scott who made the remark I was going to put into Thackeray's mouth just now. The fact is, they all said so many handsome things about whatever little assistance I was happy enough to give them that I often forget who paid me the particular compliment I am vain enough to remember. And now, my young friend, let me see some of your work. If it is what I expect it to be I will do for you as I have done for many other young writers who have put themselves in my hands.'

I placed a manuscript before him, and watched his venerable face as he turned over the leaves, as anxiously as a nervous patient watches the face of the doctor who is feeling his pulse.

The opinion of this great novelist-maker would mean life or death to me, and I waited tremblingly for his verdict.

Mr. Barnabas Pluckwell looked up from the manuscript with a beaming smile, and assured me that if I cultivated the gift that was in me for a certain

style of fiction I would in time be second to no living author in that particular line.

Then, as I glowed with the joy of this wonderful encouragement, he went on to advise the elaboration of the short story under his consideration into a one-volume novel, for which, if put into the proper channel, I ought to receive a hundred pounds, and secure a reputation that would make my next work worth, at least, a thousand.

In answer to my eager inquiry I was informed that the proper channel was the 'Crescent Moon Publishing Company,' that would presently be in a position to offer extraordinary advantages to young authors, but just now had to limit those advantages to shareholders.

With my high hopes suddenly cast down, I confessed that I had only ten pounds in my possession, and supposed that nothing I could spare out of that small sum would be worth the consideration of the Crescent Moon capitalists.

Mr. Pluckwell's grandpaternal countenance shaded thoughtfully, and then beamed again.

Large capital, he said, was certainly necessary to start such a gigantic work as the Crescent Moon meant to do, and most of the present shareholders had invested largely ; but considering the report he felt himself justified in making of my exceptional talent, he thought an exceptionally small investment might place me in the desirable position of a shareholder.


Of course, he could not promise anything. There were hard-headed business men on the committee who might not incline their ears to his

pleading voice, but if I would trust him with five pounds he would do his best with it ; and if his efforts on my behalf were unsuccessful he would return me the money.

So foolish was I and ignorant that I trusted him with five pounds, and believed myself in fortune's way when he assured me with a parting smile that he believed there was no fear of my money being returned.

So I started on the elaboration of my short story into a one-volume novel with all the energy of a hopeful heart. I had decided that the possession of a hundred pounds and the prospect of a thousand would justify me in claiming my child, when one never-to-be-forgotten morning I saw the newspaper report of a case in which Barnabas Pluckwell was charged with obtaining various sums of money under the false pretence of helping young authors.

Then I put away my unfinished novel, and asked myself what I must do to be saved from starvation. I never for one moment entertained the idea of an application to Mr. Brown of the Manchester warehouse. If I asked the means of support from my father-in-law I must confess myself beaten in the battle for my child, and I would not yet give up the struggle. So I turned my eyes, as so many other desponding eyes have turned, to the advertisements for wanted governesses, and began to waste shoe leather in calling on advertisers, as I had wasted postage stamps in communicating with editors.



CHAPTER II

GENERALLY USEFUL

LOOKING back from my present clear point of view I am not surprised that Liverpool matrons declined with more or less courtesy to give a trial of governessing to one who had nothing to offer in the way of references.

Pepper Smith of Manchester would have been a good referee for an ordinary governess, but I shrank from the natural inquiries that would have been made about the extraordinary circumstance of Pepper Smith's daughter-in-law needing the situation of a governess.

'Look here, young woman,' said a plain-spoken mother of children to me one day, 'people as a rule prefer single governesses to married ones, and a widow who looks as confused as you do when she is asked about her late husband has no chance at all. Take my advice, Mrs. Smith, if that is really your name, and call yourself Miss Smith or Miss anything else you like if you don't want to be asked questions you don't seem to find it convenient to answer.'

The plain speech shocked me, but as I slowly

walked back to the lodging I could not much longer pay for, I resolved to take the advice so rudely given.

That night I took off my wedding ring, removed the emblems of widowhood from my bonnet, and told my landlady what I had done.

She was a hard-featured, but by no means hard-hearted old Scotchwoman, who, holding the national views about the sanctity of her own affairs, respected the holy ground of her neighbour's business, and with the simple remark, 'Ye ken best yersel', she accepted me as Miss Smith without question or protest.

I had changed my last sovereign, and was wondering what sort of employment was given to young women in the workhouse, when my easily-attracted eye was caught by an advertisement that offered a comfortable home to a young lady who would make herself generally useful in a genteel boarding school.

There was no mention of salary, but as I had not expected to be salaried in the workhouse I made haste to apply for the home comforts of the genteel boarding school.

It happened to be situated in the street next to the one I lodged in, and from my window I had sometimes seen the schoolmistress walking abroad with the thirty boarders, who might have been called vulgar if they had not been advertised as genteel.

Miss Hogge in her marching array had not attracted me, and I did not find her more attractive among the Berlin wool surroundings of her genteel drawing-room.

She was a tall woman, with a stiff, straight figure, and a severely-featured face that reminded

me of Queen Elizabeth's effigy in Westminster Abbey, and her personal adornments of silver and gold were not more tolerable than her drawing-room decorations.

'I am an orphan,' I said, repeating like a lesson what I had prepared as an answer to certain inquiries. 'I was born in Australia and educated in Ireland.'

'Were you educated at a genteel boarding school?' asked Miss Hogge, fingering one of her long gold earrings.

She had not the voice that Shakespeare thought excellent in a woman, and her pronunciation of Shakespeare's native language left much to be desired.

'My schoolmistress did not call her school a genteel one,' I said, remembering Miss Thorn with a pang, 'but some people may have considered it so.'

'Tell me what the terms were and I'll tell you what the school was,' said Miss Hogge, excitedly opening one of her silver bracelets.

'The usual terms were not paid for me,' I answered. 'The lady who educated me was good enough to take the responsibility of my entire support for seven years in return for three hundred pounds.'

'So well she might,' cried Miss Hogge, shutting her silver bracelet with a snap. 'I'd do it for half the money in a place like Ireland, where potatoes are to be had for nothing. The Irish live on potatoes, don't they?'

'Not altogether,' I said, remembering the daily visits of butcher and baker to Thornville.

'Oh, well, a bit of bacon sometimes, I daresay,'



said Miss Hogge, turning round a second silver bracelet ; ' and bacon ought to be cheap enough in a land of pigs like Ireland.'

As I could not speak with authority about the price of Irish bacon, I went on with my own prepared lesson.

' I have never been a governess before, and I can give no reference but the landlady with whom I have lodged since I came to Liverpool ; but I will try to give you satisfaction if you will engage me.'

' Well, perhaps, I'll give you a trial,' said Miss Hogge, caressing her watch chain. ' My look-out now is to get a heap of worry off my own back, and I mustn't be too particular about the sort of help I get. I daresay you'll do till Christmas, and I may be able to suit myself better after that. I don't suppose there's very much amiss with you. It isn't as if you were a fine handsome young woman. Not that I think handsome folks oughtn't to behave themselves,' said Miss Hogge, elevating her Elizabethan nose. ' I was always considered to have a remarkably beautiful countenance, but it was never a snare to me. On the contrary, I always from my earliest girlhood made a point of nipping the attentions of the opposite sex in the bud. I remember when I visited my grandpapa, who had an elegant hat shop in Warrington, and lived in a private villa with a gravel walk before the door, that a gentleman residing in the town used to come out every evening after business hours and pace that gravel walk with a letter containing a proposal of marriage, waiting in vain for me to come to the door and receive it.'

I wondered how Miss Hogge knew there was

a proposal in that unread letter, and why the Warrington gentleman had not posted it, but I continued to listen silently while Miss Hogge sang to the praise and glory of her own virtue.

‘But every one is not like me, and if handsome people have not my principle they may live to wish they had been born ugly. However, as I said before, there is no fear of any one who can pass in a crowd like you, and as I am desperately bothered just now I’ll take you at once, and if you shape to your work you’ll find a place that isn’t to be had every day for the asking, I can tell you, Miss what’s-her-name.’

‘My name is Smith,’ I said, thinking how much more of a gentlewoman my old Scotch landlady, whom I had left at her wash-tub, was than this genteel Englishwoman in her drawing-room chair.

‘Smith!’ repeated Miss Hogge discontentedly; ‘now I call that unfortunate. The fact is, I want to pass you off as a French governess if you can speak French, and I suppose you can.’

‘I used to speak French at school,’ I answered; ‘but I have not had much practice since, and I don’t think it would be right——’

Here I pulled myself up suddenly in confusion. I was going to say that I did not think it would be right to pass for anything but what I was, when I remembered that I, a married woman, was passing for a single one.

‘Perhaps you will allow me to judge of what is right and wrong in my own concerns,’ said Miss Hogge snappishly. ‘What is your Christian name?’

‘Rosamund.’

‘Rosamund,’ repeated my future employer in a slightly pacified tone. ‘That’s a sort of French name, isn’t it? Yes, I think it will do very well pronounced in the proper French way. Rossamoond—Ross-ah-moond—that sounds nice and Frenchy, don’t it? Oh, I was always reckoned to have a very elegant French pronunciation, though I could never give my time to anything so frivolous as French conversation. Yes, I’ll introduce you to the young ladies as Mademoiselle Rosamund, and they can write home and say they have got the French governess some of their mammas have been bothering me about so long.’

‘They will find out I am not French,’ I said dejectedly; and I was going to add—‘I hate shams,’ when I remembered that if Mademoiselle Rosamund would be a sham, so would Miss Smith.

‘Well, if I give them board, washing, lodging, and an elegant English education, with music and drawing, and all the fashionable kinds of fancy work for £30 a year, I don’t see how I can be expected to bring over all the foreign teachers on the Continent,’ cried Miss Hogge, glaring at me as if I had been responsible for these enormous expectations, ‘and if you don’t choose to take the place, you can leave it.’

‘Oh, I will take it if you will give it to me,’ I said, thinking of the little change I had left out of my last sovereign. ‘Am I to teach anything but French?’

‘Do you think you would be worth your keep if you didn’t?’ asked Miss Hogge contemptuously.

‘Do you suppose I couldn’t have my pick of poor foreigners if I only wanted them to chatter French from morning till night? Oh yes, I want you to do a few more things, but not what any able-bodied young woman who isn’t wickedly lazy ought to think twice about. You will have to teach the little ones everything, and take the class of elder young ladies when I am otherwise engaged. I have a dancing master for those who pay for him, but you must teach those who don’t, and I shall expect you to give a music lesson when I am not equal to it myself. I am such a thorough musician that every false note makes my head ache, and I can’t be tried in that way. Then, as I only keep one servant, I always expect my governess to help a bit with the housework. I used to insist on the elder young ladies making their own beds, but the mammas said it wasn’t ladylike, and so I had to make the governess help the girl. Then, of course, you must take the young ladies out walking when I don’t, and put them through their pole exercises on wet days. I don’t think there is much more, except looking after the darning and mending, and washing the little ones’ heads, and hearing them say their prayers. You see, when all is said and done, it is no more than looking after a family of young sisters, as any active young woman might do in her own father’s house.’

I did not see that any young woman, however active, was likely to have thirty young sisters to look after, but I only said, ‘When shall I come?’

‘To-day, if you don’t want to lose the place,’ said Miss Hogge, rising from her green rep chair. ‘My last governess left me a week ago because her

mother died, and her father pretended he couldn't do without her. Of course, he didn't care how *I* was inconvenienced, and the servant said she would leave at the end of the month if I didn't get some one to help her, and to-morrow will be the last day of the month. What a selfish world it is, and what a mercy that some day the righteous will be separated from the wicked! Come back as fast as you can, and then you can take charge of the young ladies while I go out to the missionary tea party I was afraid I couldn't have the privilege of attending.'

When I was moving my small possessions from my lodgings I remembered gratefully the plates of hot porridge on cold winter nights of which my hard-featured landlady had indignantly refused to make mention in my weekly bills, and the bunches of early spring flowers brought from Saturday morning's market to make my room 'more cheerful like.'

'Haud yer tongue, woman,' she exclaimed when I was trying to make a parting speech of thanks, 'and dinna forget to come and tell me what like yon school is. I'm no that puir that I canna gie a bit scone to yer tea on a Sabbath afternoon.'

I found Miss Hogge bonneted and mantled for her missionary tea party, knitting furiously in the hall.

Having commented severely on my extravagance in taking a cab from the next street when I might have got the greengrocer's boy at the corner to wheel my box on his barrow for a couple of pence, and viciously warned the cabman against knocking that box against her walls on his way upstairs, she

folded her knitting with a familiar quotation about Satan and idle hands, and an improving remark on the value of time, told me to hang up my bonnet on the umbrella stand, and follow her.

I followed her down to the basement story, where, in a low-ceiled, ill-ventilated room, her thirty boarders sat on forms round a long table with nothing on it but a more than half-soiled cloth.

'Stand up, young ladies,' said the schoolmistress sternly. 'How often am I to tell you that it is polite to stand up during an introduction? Young ladies, allow me to introduce Mademoiselle Rosamund, your new French governess. Now incline your heads gracefully. Oh, Eliza Matilda Pratt, is that the way the dancing master teaches you to bow? Now, Belinda Bragge, stop sniggering this moment or you go to bed without your tea. Is this the return you make to your good mamma, who toils so hard in her elegant millinery warerooms to have you taught ladylike manners? Mademoiselle Rosamund, remember you are to insist on the young ladies talking French all tea-time. Sit down, young ladies, and behave yourselves. Mademoiselle, take the head of the table, and when tea is brought in say a French grace. *Bong swar*, mademoiselle. *Bong swar*, young ladies. *Ill faw que je departe poor law swarry missionary.*' And evidently delighted with her own success in the exercise of the French tongue, Miss Hogge departed with a beaming smile.

Immediately after her exit an untidy young servant with a pert pretty face entered, and proceeded to place a breakfast cup of what I supposed was tea,

and a plate containing two half slices of what I believed to be buttered bread, before each of the waiting company. Then I nervously repeated the French grace I had learned at Thornville, and the meal began.

I took a sip out of my thick-lipped cup, wondering how the mixture therein could by any stretch of courtesy be called tea, and having bitten one of my half slices, supposed that the oily smear I had mistaken for butter must be paraffin.

'If you ain't hungry, mamzelle, you might let me have your bread,' said a thin sallow girl, with a dark dirty-looking fringe down to her thick eyebrows.

'Not all of it,' said a fat and freckled damsel on the other side of the table; 'half to me, please, mamzelle.'

'I spoke first,' cried the sallow-faced one, scowling her heavy brows.

'All right,' laughed the freckled claimant. 'Give the bit with the bite out of it to me, and you take the whole bit. That's fair now, ain't it, mamzelle?'

'Divide it as you please,' I said, pushing away my plate disgustedly, 'but don't squabble about it in that shocking way, and please remember that you are to speak French.'

The loud laugh that greeted my last words reminded me to my great confusion that I myself had forgotten to speak French. Then I kept rather a long silence, because I did not find it so easy to put my English thoughts into neat French sentences as it would have been five years ago, when daily practice had made me perfect in conversational French of the English boarding-school kind.

At last I found voice to deliver myself of my carefully-prepared speech, to the effect that as my duty on the present occasion was to insist on the demoiselles I was addressing speaking French, I hoped they would not make that duty difficult by persisting in English conversation.

‘*Mademoiselle*,’ said a voice half-way down the long table, ‘you have a very good pronunciation.’

The words were spoken in English, but with an imitation of the French accent that was good enough to be laughed at by these English girls.

The speaker was Maria Hornby, a remarkably ugly girl, and, as I afterwards discovered, the wit of the school. She was the daughter of a police court attorney, and, as the only representative of the professional classes, was highly esteemed by Miss Hogge for the ‘tone’ she gave to the school.

‘There is nothing like the accent Parisian,’ continued the witty Maria. ‘I know it, *mademoiselle*, I know it, for your beautiful country is also the country of my mother. Oh yes, *mademoiselle*, I resided there for one happy year with a distinguished relation of my dear mamma. His name is Monsieur le Marquis de Moriarty, and his charming château is situated on the fragrant banks of the Liffey.’

Miss Hornby’s school-fellows laughed again. Some laughed because they had an intelligent appreciation of her humour, others because they were in the habit of laughing at everything Miss Hornby said.

I sat speechless and confounded. My speech, with its lingering remnant of brogue, had betrayed

me, and Mademoiselle Rosamund was a convicted sham.

So I lost at the first start of this new life the self-respect without which no one can gain the respect of others, and I had too strong a sympathy with the English contempt for sham to resent the contempt of these English school-girls for a French governess with an Irish accent.

Sometimes, when my whole head was sick with the genuine vulgarity of Miss Hogge's young ladies, and my whole heart was faint with their still more sickening affectation of gentility, I wondered if Charles Kingsley's call for a missionary to our middle-class English girl would ever be answered.

Some of these young ladies, who would not for the world have been called girls, seemed capable of seeing a higher blessedness than 'going on' with the various 'young gentlemen' to be met with on New Brighton or Eastham boats in holiday excursion times, but it was not for the sham French governess to start a mission for the promotion of womanly dignity.

When Miss Hogge had spoken of the little ones whose prayers I was to hear, I had turned with a motherly yearning to the thought of children young enough to be fondled.

But most of Miss Hogge's little ones were scarcely to be distinguished from her elder young ladies, and I was struck by a sense of absurdity very unbecoming the solemn occasion when the biggest girl of fourteen I ever saw flung herself down at my knee and prayed, 'Bless Thy little lamb to-night.'

Miss Hogge's line of distinction was simple and

clear. The elder young ladies paid for a dancing master and table beer; the little ones learned dancing from the governess, and drank water at dinner-time. The elder young ladies had half a slice of bread and dripping at half-past eight; the little ones went supperless to bed at eight.

There was not a little one little enough to be petted, and they all considered themselves big enough to have an opinion about 'young gentlemen.'

How have I lived through the last six months? I ask myself, as I look back on the life of general usefulness.

Apart from the soul starvation and heart sickness how have I preserved my body alive?

In an ordinary way thirty pounds a year for a genteel boarding-school education does not leave a large margin for profit, and when I express my belief that Miss Hogge profits largely, I need scarcely add that her housekeeping is conducted on a scale of extraordinary economy.

I have long ceased to wonder at the battle of the bread that shocked me on the evening of my arrival, and it is just as long since any one has gained by my want of appetite.

I no longer object to paraffin-flavoured butter. Caterpillars among the cabbage no longer appal me, and I am at last reconciled to resurrection pie.

In a popular weekly paper I lately saw a six months' residence in one of her Majesty's prisons recommended by a sensible writer to his fellowmen as a cure for dyspepsia. To any woman suffering from failure of digestive power I would as strongly

recommend six months' hard labour in a genteel boarding school.

This morning, when alone with Miss Hogge, I made bold to suggest the idea of a small salary next year. She did not receive it well. On the contrary, she wondered how I could think of such a thing when I considered her generosity in giving me board and lodging in the holidays, when there was no teaching to do, and I was so little good at the house cleaning.

If she salaried any one it would be a proper governess, and she would like to know what I wanted with a salary when all my wants were supplied.

I ventured to remind her that she herself had commented on the shabbiness of my dress last Sunday, and I confessed that the appearance of my boots had made me uncomfortable.

She then admitted that I was a disgrace to a genteel boarding school, and supposed she must see if she hadn't some 'cast offs' that she could bestow on me.

One of her old dresses would be more stylish than any new one a young person in my position could be expected to buy, and now that she thought of it, I might have a pair of boots that she never could wear because they were not high enough in the instep.

I have so far outlived vanity that I can reflect calmly on the prospect of Miss Hogge's cast-off gown, though its particular style may not commend itself to my taste; but by the way I shrink from the idea of Miss Hogge's elastic-sided boots, some few sizes larger than my own worn-out Hessians, I know that I am still a woman.

I suppose she will never give me a salary, and as she candidly says she would never feel justified in recommending me to any one else, I seem to have no chance of claiming my boy.

One only comfort I have had in this past time of struggle—the thought that while I was cold and hungry my child was warmed and fed. For the future I must take all the consolation I can get out of the assurance that however ill I fare it will be well with him.

One thing only he will lack—the presence of his own mother, and he will never miss that while Helen, his grandfather's wife, is with him.

It is a year to-day since I looked on his face, and now I do not even know where he is. At first Morgan used to give me regular news of him in the best English she could write, but the time came when Morgan had no news to give.

Bryn Hall was advertised for sale in the spring. The servants were all dismissed, and Mr. and Mrs. Pepper Smith left Llandhul, taking the child with them.

They were supposed to be travelling on the Continent, but as they kept up no correspondence with the people of Llandhul, Morgan could never get any certain information as to their whereabouts.

‘The time draws near the birth of Christ.’

Mothers and children rejoice together in the light that leads to Bethlehem, while I, looking forward to another lonely new year, cannot lift my hopeless eyes to the Christmas star.

The door of the upper chamber, which in this holiday time I have all to myself, is suddenly opened

without the ceremony of a warning knock, and the pert pretty face of her who may truly be called my fellow-servant appears bright-eyed and flushed before me.

'Oh, mamzelle, what do you think? There's a gentleman asking for you downstairs.'

'Me, Clara?'

My voice has the incredulous tone of a woman who feels certain that no gentleman she ever knew knows where she is to be asked for.

'Well, he asked for the young lady who is guvness here,' says Clara, stopping before my unbecoming looking-glass to arrange the flaxen fringe about which she and her mistress battle daily, 'and there is no other guvnesses in this 'ouse, which is all the better for theirselves.'

'I suppose he is father to one of the pupils,' I say indifferently, 'and wants to see me because Miss Hogge is out.'

'Not he,' says Clara, with her dimpled chin in the air. 'He speaks too polite for any of that rubbishy lot. Oh, he's quite the gentleman, he is. Not what may be called 'andsome, and p'raps not so young as he used to be, but he has the loveliest eyes, and the beautifullest smile, and his clothes fit him that neat. Oh, mamzelle, what's the matter? You're all of a shake. Ah, you needn't tell me you don't know who the gent is now.'

'I know,' I say faintly; 'but I think I will not see him, Clara.'

'Oh, but you will, though,' says Clara firmly. 'It's a pity you 'ave to go down such a figger to a gent like that'—looking over me sympathetically.

‘ Nothing looks so bad as black when it gets shabby, and you ain’t ’alf what you was when you came to this starvation ’ouse ; but that can’t be ’elped, and he must take you as he finds you. If he had waited much longer there wouldn’t ’ave been nothink of you left to find. Now, I say, mamzelle, if you don’t run down afore missis comes ’ome to say as she don’t allow no follerers, I’ll bring that there gent up to you, as sure as my name is Clara Fagg.’

I do not run, but walk slowly downstairs, not daring to ask myself whether I am glad or sorry that Fate, in the form of Clara Fagg, is driving me, whether I will or no, into the presence of John Westropp.

CHAPTER III

IN A GENTEEL DRAWING-ROOM

‘OH, Rosey, my poor child, what has brought you to this?’

John Westropp, holding both my hands, looked into my face with the sort of pity that a woman can scarcely endure till womanly vanity is stone dead, and by the sudden stirring of my long-sleeping vanity I knew that it had not yet given up the ghost.

Day by day I had read the unflattering tale of my unbecoming looking-glass without emotion, but I was deeply moved by the pain in the eyes to which my appearance had once been pleasant.

‘Am I such a deplorable object?’ I asked, wishing myself farther away from the window through which the noonday sun was at that moment shining with a brilliance that was extraordinary in December.

He did not answer, but dropped my hands and turned his own face away from the light, as if he too found that strange December sunshine trying.

‘Won’t you sit down?’ I asked, not without a

certain timidity about offering the hospitality of a chair in Miss Hogge's genteel drawing-room.

He took the seat next me, unconscious of its green rep sanctity, and silently studied the opposite wall, where a half-length oil portrait of Miss Hogge, in her largest brooch and longest earrings, hung between two of her own artistic triumphs in Berlin wool—Rebecca at the well, and Ruth in the corn-field.

'How did you know I was here?' I asked from the green rep chair in which I sat with a nervous eye on the street, where the original of the portrait might appear at any moment.

'This time last year,' he said, with his eyes still on the artistic wall, 'I made up my mind to see you in a year's time. I did not think you would hear what I had to say sooner. The day before yesterday I reached Llandhul, expecting to find you at Bryn Hall. I only knew what the newspaper told me about the trouble there last year, and I had heard nothing about the other changes. I found strangers at Bryn Hall, and none of the old neighbours knew anything about you. Then I hunted up Morgan in her new place, and interviewed her. She gave me the address of your last abode, and a dear old stiff-necked Scotchwoman directed me here. I had some considerable difficulty in assuring her of my trustworthiness,'—and John Westropp smiled at the Berlin wool Rebecca—'but I never thought so highly of Scotch caution. I rather think I admire her style of beauty more than that'—and he pointed to the oil portrait that hung between Rebecca and Ruth.

'So do I,' I said with decision. 'Miss Hogge in all her jewellery is not to be compared with Mrs. Bogie at her wash-tub.'

'Rosey,' said John Westropp, suddenly turning his eyes on me, 'why did you come here? Morgan was full of indignation about your leaving your father-in-law's house, but she did not know why you had left or how you were circumstanced, and she solemnly charged me to find out the whole truth. Rosey, will you tell me all?'

'There is not much to tell,' I said hurriedly. 'Eugene's father wished to part with me after Eugene's death, and he wished to keep our child. I would not take any money without my boy, and Mr. Smith would give me none with him. I thought I could earn enough money to support us both, and I came away to try. I have tried and failed. That's all.'

John Westropp rose from Miss Hogge's green rep chair and stood before me.

'Rosey,' he said, 'do you still think I am John Darker?'

'No,' I answered. 'Eugene's father told me the truth the day Eugene was buried.'

'Did he? Poor man!'

There was in John Westropp's voice the genuine pity that showed how he realised the depth of woe out of which Pepper Smith had lifted his voice to declare himself as John Darker.

'I would never have told you,' he said after a long pause. 'I always devoutly hoped that neither you nor Eugene would ever know, and while Eugene lived I would not have disturbed your mind by removing a false impression of me.'

'How did you know I had that impression?' I asked wonderingly.

'The day I called at Bryn Hall,' he answered constrainedly, 'Miss Bratton and I walked and talked together, and as we talked she staggered me with a direct attack on me as John Darker. She had thrown out many dark hints in the course of our former acquaintance that made me fear she had been sharp enough to guess Pepper Smith's secret, but I never dreamt that she suspected me of anything more than a knowledge of his identity with John Darker. How we have both been mystified! You thought you could not marry me because I had killed your father, and I supposed you had been easily persuaded to marry the sweetheart who could give you the most sweeties.'

'I know you now,' I cried, as a long-confused memory became suddenly clear. 'I know why your eyes were familiar to me that day in Liverpool. You are the saloon passenger who gave me figs and told me the meaning of philosophy. But,' in a new perplexity, 'I always called you "Mr. Brick." Flora told me that was your name.'

'Flora gave you the interesting information on the authority of her mamma,' said John Westropp, with the old familiar smile in his eyes. 'You must know, Rosey, my child, that I was once in the Royal Engineers, commonly called "Bricklayers" by irreverent outsiders. A certain young man in a line regiment, who was sailing home on sick leave, happened to salute me as "Brick" the day I went on board the *Conqueror*, and the captain's wife, who, as you may remember, was rather a solemn Scotch-

woman, thinking it was my surname, introduced me as "Mr. Brick" to the other ladies. A little joke goes a long way in the saloon of a sailing ship, and this little joke lasted all the three months of the voyage. Yes, I was one of your many sweethearts,' and John Westropp came nearer to me, 'and you were more to me than all the saloon, though I was less to you than figs.'

With a vague sense of danger in this talk of sweethearts, I rose from the green rep chair in which I sat and went towards the fire, with a daring idea of raising the top crust of slack with Miss Hogge's sacred drawing-room poker.

But John Westropp stopped my sacrilegious way to the moss-green hearthrug.

'Rosey,' he said, in the voice I had so often heard in my dreams, 'Rosey, my little sweetheart, will you be my wife?'

For one moment I saw a door opened in heaven, and the next moment I had roused all the strength of my soul to shut out the golden light.

'I cannot be your wife,' I said, trembling but triumphant. 'It is quite impossible for me to be happy with you in this world.'

'Before I dispute your refusal,' said John Westropp quietly, 'I want to be sure of your admission. Did you mean to admit that you would be happy with me?'

'Whatever I admit can make no difference,' I said wearily, as I lowered the eyes I could not lift to his, and fixed them intently on Miss Hogge's tapestry carpet.

'Rosey,' said John Westropp plaintively, 'the

brass plate on the hall door says this is an academy for young ladies.'

I looked up surprised at the remark that seemed so far from any connection with our discourse, and saw an old familiar light in the eyes that had so often irritated me in the days when I was young enough to be sensitive about my youth.

'Ah, that's right,' said the old familiar voice. 'Always look at the person who is addressing you. How odd that I should have occasion to give a lesson in good manners to a young lady the first time I find myself in an academy for young ladies! Now, Rosey,'—here the smiling eyes grew grave—'I will tell you what difference is made by your admission that you would be happy with me. It makes all the difference in the world to me, because it means that you can find it in your heart to love me. My dear, let us understand each other at last. What I told you that night in the porch at Bryn Hall is as true now as it was then. I love you now as I loved you then. I do not ask you if you love me now. I only ask you if you loved me then. Answer me truly.'

There was a command in his voice that I could not disobey. I looked straight into his eyes and answered him truly.

'I loved you then. I loved you before then. I think I loved you all the time I was trying to hate you for teasing me because I was young. I thought I knew how I loved you when as John Darker I had to put you out of my life, but I did not know how strong my love was till I had to fight against it as a sin.'

'My darling'—he would have caught me in his

arms as on that August night in Bryn Hall porch, but I made haste to escape.

'Don't,' I said resolutely, with my employer's mahogany table between my lover and me. 'I have told you the truth about loving you, but what I told you before is just as true. I cannot be your wife.'

'In God's name why?'

A great darkness had fallen on the face that my confession had made so wondrous bright a moment before.

'Because,' I said, 'my father-in-law believes that you and I are accountable for his son's death.'

And in as few words as possible I told him of Pepper Smith's charge.

John Westropp's face worked with strong emotion as he listened, but there was decision in his agitated voice as he answered.

'Rosey, my child, this sin is not to be laid to our charge. Are you not as sure of that as I am?'

'Yes,' I said, 'if I were not convinced of it I could not live. I do not think Eugene was unhappy in the way his father thinks, but there is a mystery about his unhappiness after your visit to Bryn Hall that cannot be solved now, and we must only wait in patience till the Day shall declare it.'

'No,' said John Westropp firmly, 'we must not. I have not the supernatural patience to wait for my happiness till the Day of Judgment, and I will not wait so long if I can help it. There was a fanciful barrier set up between us five years ago. Do not let another fancy come between us and happiness now.'

'Oh, do not talk of happiness,' I entreated. 'I must not think of it. Years ago I found it possible

to live without it, and it is not more impossible now.'

'For argument's sake,' said John Westropp, looking steadily at me with the eyes against which it was so hard to argue—'for argument's sake we will suppose that you have a right to do as you will with your own happiness; but what about mine? Do you think you have a right to make me unhappy, very much against my own will?'

'You will be happy with some one else,' I said, with a miserable attempt at a cheerful delivery of my prophecy,—'some one who has not lost her looks like me.'

He looked at me as only the rare man can look who is proof against the chances and changes of a woman's complexion.

'That some one else might be in possession of all her own looks, but they would not be yours, and I could not be happy with any one who looked anything but you. You will never lose the one look I love, and as for the rest—well, looks are not hopelessly lost at twenty-two, and Devonshire is a famous place for finding that sort of missing property. Come with me, Rosey, and let us make the search together.'

'No, no,' I said as decidedly as I could speak with my tongue, while my heart was full of desire and longing to answer differently. 'I can do nothing but the thing that seems to me right, and it seems to me altogether wrong to think of a happy life with you while Eugene's father holds me accountable for Eugene's miserable death.'

'My dear child, you are morbid,' said my lover in the fatherly tone of a family physician. 'You want

change of air, but I will not talk any more about Devonshire for the present. Let me send you to my sister Sara in Cumberland. She is a widow with boys at school, and is dreadfully in want of a daughterly companion. Sara is very like me in outward appearance, so I need scarcely say that she is not, like the plaintiff in breach of promise cases, "of great personal attractions," but she is a sound-headed and sound-hearted woman, and she would give you all the motherly care you want just now, my poor child. Now, don't shake your head. It is not as if Sara and I were next-door neighbours. Her place is in Cumberland, and mine is in Devonshire, so you need not be afraid of my dropping in often to afternoon tea.'

I could only shake my head again. I did not think a residence with John Westropp's motherly sister would strengthen what I held to be a right resolve, even with all the distance from north to south between John Westropp and me.

'Well, you must not stay here,' he said, with the quiet authority of the family physician ordering an exodus from an unsanitary house. 'By the bye, what do you receive in return for your valuable services in this academy for young ladies?'

'A comfortable home,' I said, quoting from Miss Hogge's advertisement.

'Just so,' said Mr. Westropp, with thoughtful eyes on Miss Hogge's portrait. 'That face is in perfect harmony with the "salary no object" idea.'

'Oh, here she is!' I exclaimed, struck with panic at the sound of Miss Hogge's latch-key in the hall door.

‘How very fortunate,’ said my visitor calmly, ‘just when I was wishing so much to make Miss Hogge’s acquaintance.’

In another moment his wish was gratified, and Miss Hogge stood before him with her Elizabethan nose brightened by the frosty air.

‘I thought I heard voices in the drawing-room, but I did not expect visitors at this time of the day,’ she said, with a sharp look at me that seemed to inquire if this were the sort of visitor on whom to bestow the smile reserved for parents and guardians. ‘Has this gentleman called about boarders?’

Before I could speak the gentleman had answered for himself as naturally as if he were the father of daughters.

‘I shall be obliged if you will let me have a prospectus.’

‘Be seated, sir, and I will give you all information about my terms,’ said Miss Hogge in her most magnificent parent-and-guardian interviewing style. ‘Mademoiselle Rosamund, you need not stay.’

John Westropp started at hearing me addressed as ‘Mademoiselle Rosamund,’ but recovered himself quickly.

‘Good-bye till Miss Hogge gives me permission to call again,’ he said as I advanced to the door.

‘Any gentleman who comes on business is welcome to call when he pleases,’ said Miss Hogge in the doubtful voice of a mind divided between the hope that the gentleman in her drawing-room was a paying parent, and the suspicion that he might be a follower of her hired servant, Mademoiselle Rosamund.

‘Thanks very many,’ said Mr. Westropp as he held open the door for my exit.

‘Oh, don’t mention it, sir,’ said Miss Hogge, with the ironical politeness that assured me she was now entirely on the side of suspicion, ‘and I may tell you, sir, that my governess is accustomed to open doors for herself in my house.’

‘Really?’ I heard John Westropp murmur in a softly interrogative voice as he gently closed the door after me.

CHAPTER IV

MORGAN'S LETTER

Is this a rasher that I see before me? and can it be Miss Hogge who is offering me a new-laid egg?

I vaguely remember now that there were changes at dinner and tea-time yesterday that might have surprised me if there had been room for small surprises in a mind filled with the great surprise of John Westropp's visit, but I do not think there was anything so surprising as a new-laid egg that cannot be bought at this time of year under what Miss Hogge calls the sinful price of twopence.

'You want nourishment, mademoiselle,' says Miss Hogge, with the smile that has lately appeared among other surprises, 'and you shall have it now that I have time to take care of you. As I told Mr. Westropp yesterday, you cannot be trusted to take care of yourself.'

Miss Hogge has laid many sins to my charge during the last six months, but this is the first time she has accused me of transgressing the law of self-preservation.

'We can have a comfortable bit of breakfast in the holidays, when we have not to set an example

of moderation to those greedy girls,' continues Miss Hogge, who, out of the holidays, eats her bacon and eggs alone, leaving me to set an example of moderation in bread and paraffin.

'Mr. Westropp seems quite the gentleman,' goes on Miss Hogge, pouring out the tea. 'He does not look like a business gentleman, so I suppose he is a professional gentleman.'

'I believe,' I say, with my eyes on the darkest breakfast beverage I have seen for six months—'I believe Mr. Westropp has some property in Devonshire.'

'An estated gentleman!' exclaims Miss Hogge, in her excitement speaking as she often tells her young ladies no genteel person ever speaks—with her mouth full. 'Dear me! How strange that a man of that stamp should take such an interest in a young woman in your position!—but perhaps some of your relations are in his employment?'

'No,' I say, taking the top off the surprising egg, 'they are not.'

'Well, anyhow, it is very handsome of him,' says Miss Hogge, passing me the salt.

'What?' I ask, curious to know how Miss Hogge finds Mr. Westropp handsome.

'Oh, nothing,' she answers confusedly, sipping her tea, 'I only meant to say he was an uncommonly nice gentleman. Has he any daughters?'

'No,' I say, 'he is not married.'

'You don't say so!' cries Miss Hogge in a state of excitement greater than the first. 'How very strange! Now a man in that position ought to be married, but I suppose he is very particular, and he

is quite right. It is not every one who would be fit for an estated gentleman's wife. Oh yes, he is quite right to be particular. I am very particular myself. Now I have just the right sort of wife for Mr. Westropp in my mind's eye. Some one with a commanding figure'—here Miss Hogge sits as upright on her chair as Queen Elizabeth on her horse at Tilbury—'with a handsome countenance'—here Miss Hogge puts her head into the position that best displays her Elizabethan profile—'who would take the head of his dinner table with dignity.' And Miss Hogge smiles dreamily at the Mrs. Westropp in her mind's eye.

I say nothing, but in my own mind I wonder how Mr. Westropp would like a dinner of resurrection pie.

'You said something yesterday about a salary, mademoiselle,' said Miss Hogge after breakfast. 'I could not see my way to it then, but I have been turning it over in my mind, and I think I can manage it next year. We needn't settle anything till after the holidays, but as it's Christmas time, I don't mind giving you a little something in your pocket. What do you say to ten pounds?'

I did not know what to say to ten pounds. I was as much surprised as if Miss Hogge had asked me what I would say to ten thousand pounds.

Without waiting for an answer she took a ten-pound note from her purse and held it out to me.

'You are very kind,' I gasped, suddenly struck with remorse for the judgment I had often passed on Miss Hogge's unkindness.

'Put it in your pocket,' said Miss Hogge, with

an evidently sincere desire to stop any gush of thanks.

I did not put it in my pocket. I held it in my hand, and looked at it with wonder. This ten-pound note was indeed a wonderful sight to one who had not handled a penny of her own for half a year.

It did not occur to me at that time to wonder how Miss Hogge, who always maintained that the Bank was the place for bank notes, happened to have such a large note in the purse from which I had never before seen her take anything but small silver.

'I want to join the strips of my new antimacassar,' said Miss Hogge, diving into her work-bag for yellow wool. 'If I make haste it will be done before Mr. Westropp calls. He said he would be here at twelve this morning, and I want to have the drawing-room nice. He is just the sort of man to have an eye for such things.'

I did not enter into the question of Mr. Westropp's eye for antimacassars. My mind was too much exercised with a natural joy in the thought of his visit, and a supernatural effort to suppress that joy.

'Miss Hogge,' I said hesitatingly, 'perhaps it will not be necessary for me to see Mr. Westropp.'

'Oh dear no, if you would rather not,' said Miss Hogge, with a decision that did not relieve me as it might have done. 'I shall be happy to entertain Mr. Westropp, and I am pleased to see you so sensible, mademoiselle. A young woman in your position can't be too cautious about pushing herself

on the notice of an estated gentleman. Put on your bonnet and have a look at the shop windows, but don't spend any of your money till I go out shopping with you after dinner. If you stay out till dinner-time you will escape Mr. Westropp delightfully.'

Thus encouraged, I went out, not so delighted as I ought to have been to escape Mr. Westropp.

I did not make for the shop windows, but turned into the street where Mrs. Bogie lived. Once only since I left her had I availed myself of her parting invitation to Sunday tea and scone. On that Sunday afternoon I persuaded her to take an airing before evening service, and in the course of our walk we met Belinda Bragge, who was spending that same Sunday with her mamma of the elegant millinery warerooms.

Belinda nodded to me in her good-natured way, but Belinda's mamma glared at Mrs. Bogie's bonnet, and afterwards spoke her mind so plainly to Miss Hogge that I was commanded from thenceforth to keep genteel company or no company at all.

So it happened that I only saw the grim deep-lined face that I admired so much more than Miss Hogge's Elizabethan countenance for a moment in the early morning or late evening when I could steal a march to my old lodgings for the letters that Morgan addressed there.

I never could bear to tell even my faithful Morgan how I had changed from 'Mrs.' to 'Miss,' and from 'Miss' to 'Mademoiselle,' and my old landlady always carefully preserved the letters addressed to Mrs. Eugene Smith till called for.

'Eh, but this is lucky,' said Mrs. Bogie, opening the hall door. 'There is a letter for ye wi' "immediate" on it, and I was wearyin' for ye to come for yer news.'

I followed her into the kitchen, where the remains of the drawing-room lodger's late breakfast mingled with the beginnings of a parlour lodger's early dinner, and with a beating heart took the letter marked 'immediate' in Morgan's well-known hand.

This is what I read :—

MY DEAR MUCH LOVE OLD MISTRESS—I take up the pen in very much hurry to tell you that there was come ladies and gentlemens to this house on visit for Christmas, and I was help one lady to dress for the dinner last night, when she tell me she knew Mrs. Pepper Smith since the last month. Dear Mistress, the old master and his wife and the child have house in London since the winter, and the lady tell me your dear child was so sick she think he was not live long. Dear Mistress, I think you was ought to see your dear child before he was die, and I ask the lady to write down the address of house better than me, because I think you was go when you was know. Dear Mistress, it is hard for me to tell you this, but you must keep the heart up and trust in the Lord, who is very slow, but very sure, and as the preacher say last Sunday night, the wicked peoples was not have their own ways for ever. So no more at present, from your own old maid,

MARGARET MORGAN.

The letter and the enclosed address dropped on the kitchen floor, and I sank trembling into the chair Mrs. Bogie had placed for me by the fire.

'What's wrang wi' ye, lassie?' asked the old Scotchwoman, laying her kind hard hand on me.

Then for the first time I told her of the little

child from whom I was parted, and who was now dying away from me.

She did not waste time in sympathetic words, but went hastily out of the kitchen to make some inquiry in the parlour.

'There's the next train to London,' she said, returning with a wrinkled finger on a marked place in an open railway guide, 'and the gentleman in the parlour is awa' for a cab. If ye havena yer train fare I'll gie it till ye.'

'I have it,' I said, grasping her hand with the gratitude I could not speak.

'Then awa' wi' ye to the station,' she said peremptorily, 'and dinna let mortal man nor woman come between ye and yer ain bairn. I'll tell yon schoolmistress that you've gone to London on your ain business. Oh, dinna greet sae sair, my woman. Ye're nae the first mither that was piercit wi' a sword, and ye'll nae be the last.'

CHAPTER V

'MOTHER'

AT six o'clock that foggy Christmas Eve I stood on the doorstep of Mr. Pepper Smith's London house asking the man who opened the door if I could see Mrs. Pepper Smith.

I had parted from Mrs. Bogie firmly resolved not to let mortal man or woman come between me and my own child, but the nearer I came to the end of my cold heart-sickening journey the more doubtful I grew of my own power to resist my father-in-law and his wife.

Standing at last on their doorstep, I felt wretchedly convinced that it would be utterly impossible to force my way into the house where Helen was mistress, against her will, and so I asked if I could see Mrs. Pepper Smith.

Had my mind been open to minor impressions at that moment I might have seen a singular proof of Mrs. Pepper Smith's will in the surprising fact of a butler in Mr. Pepper Smith's hall.

'Well, no, you can't see her just now because she is not in the 'ouse,' said the butler. 'Do you want to see her particklar?'

The gray smooth-faced elderly man's tone was familiar, but not impertinent, and there was none of the traditional flunkey superciliousness in his overlook of my shabby shivering figure.

'Never mind,' I said, my heart beating wildly with a sudden hope in her absence. 'I want to see the little child who is ill. Oh, will you tell me where to find him?'

'No, my dear,' said the man kindly. 'I can't let any stranger up to the nursery in that way. Just sit down and wait till missis comes back.'

'Oh, I can't, I can't,' I cried, making a wild rush to the stairs.

But the butler barred my upward way with a firm, though by no means ungentle hand.

'Don't be foolish, my girl,' he said, 'but just have a little patience. Why are you in such a way about little Master Percy? Was you ever his nurse?'


'Yes,' I gasped, 'I once nursed him.'

The butler sighed.

'Well, you poor thing, you seem that tender-hearted, I'm sorry to think there ain't no chance of missis letting you upstairs. She is that jealous of the child that she is always a-changing of nurses, so as he can't get too much attached to none of 'em, and she don't even like him to take much notice of master. So, my dear, if you was once little Master Percy's nurse, and he 'appened to be attached to you, I can't 'old out no 'ope to you.'

With a shaking hand I held out a sovereign that I had ready for such an emergency as this.

'For God's sake,' I pleaded, 'let me see the child.'



He rejected the bribe with a decision that proved how a man may be another man's servant and yet a man for all that.

'No, my dear, you don't look as if you had many of them to throw away, and I've a daughter of my own that I'd be sorry to see robbed. If your poor 'eart is that set on the child, I must see if I can't get you a sight of him afore missis comes back. Jane,' to a maid who was coming downstairs with a tray in her hand, 'just ask Master Percy's nurse to come down for a moment.'


A pale-faced woman of about thirty, with unduly deep lines about her large sad eyes, listened gravely to the butler's request that an old nurse who was very fond of Master Percy might be allowed to go up to the nursery for a few minutes.

'The mistress is only gone to Harley Street,' she said nervously. 'She is vexed because that great doctor did not come again to-day, and she has gone to ask the reason. She may be back at any moment, and what could I say if she found a stranger in the nursery?'

'Say,' I cried, with a passion that broke down all reserve, 'say that Percy's mother has come to see her child.'

The butler and the nurse looked at each other in amazement, and then the woman laid her hand on my arm.

'Poor soul!' she said softly, 'you don't know what you are talking about. I know how it is,' she said, turning to the butler; 'she lost a child of her own, and is labouring under some sort of delusion. I have seen something like this before now.'



'Ah, I daresay,' said the butler sympathetically; 'you are a married woman, Mrs. Wakefield, and you understand these things, no doubt. Now, my dear,' addressing me in the fatherly tone in which, under similar circumstances, he might have spoken to the daughter of whom he had made mention, 'listen to reason. The only child in this 'ouse belongs to my master and missis, so he can't be yours, don't you see?'

'Do they say the child is theirs?' I asked, with indignation that nearly choked my speech.

'Well, I never 'eard them say nothing about it, but I think we all thought as master and missis was the child's pa and ma,' said the butler, looking interrogatively at the nurse.

'Master Percy calls the mistress his mother, and she always speaks of him as her child,' answered the quiet-voiced nurse.

'I am his mother,' I cried, looking wildly from one perplexed face to another. 'Did neither of you ever hear of your master's son's wife?'

'I didn't,' said the butler, 'and I am sure you didn't neither, Mrs. Wakefield, but then neither you nor me is long enough in the family to know much of family matters. I'm sure I don't know what to say, Mrs. Wakefield, but your own 'eart will dictate to you better than me or any other man.'

'Come with me,' said the pale-faced nurse, taking my hand and leading me upstairs. 'I have been a mother myself, and I would risk a great deal for the sake of a mother's feelings.'

'Is he dying?' I asked, clutching her hand convulsively.

'Yes,' she answered sorrowfully, 'but the mistress will not let any one say so. Goodness knows, it isn't for want of care. I never saw a child who had so many doctors. When the mistress thinks one is doing no good she sends straight off for another, and she never leaves the nursery night or day, unless it is to run after a doctor. She has offended no end of great doctors, but she doesn't care. She cares for nothing and nobody but the child. Oh, is it possible she is not his mother?' asked the nurse, pausing at the top of the stairs to fix her dark doubtful eyes on me. 'I did not think it was possible for any one but a mother to be so anxious about a child.'

'I am his mother,' I gasped. 'Oh, where is he?'

'Here,' said the nurse, with her hand on a door; 'but do not startle him. Let me go first, and follow me quietly.'

I stood trembling for a moment on the threshold of a room bright with gas and fire, and gay with the highly-coloured pictures that little children love.

'Is mother come?' asked a little weak voice from a little white bed.

A year had made a great change in my little child's speech. As I afterwards heard, Helen had taken immense pains to make his pronunciation clear.

'If John Stuart Mill could pronounce Greek at three, I don't see why other children should not pronounce English at the same age,' she had said to one who afterwards repeated the saying to me. 'I can't make Percy read Greek at three years old, because I am not a Greek scholar like John Stuart Mill's father, but I will do my best to make him speak plain English at three years old.'

At the sound of that strangely distinct 'Mother' my heart leaped with unreasoning joy, and I bounded to the bed where my little child lay.

'Yes, my darling,' I cried, stretching out my trembling arms, 'your mother has come.'

But there was no joy in the little pinched face, that was as white as the pillow on which the little yellow head, no longer curly, moved unrestfully. There was nothing but disappointment in the eyes that looked so large in that small face, nothing but resentment in the weak little voice that whined in its now painfully plain English, 'I want mother ; oh, I want mother.'

'Darling, I am your mother—your own mother. Oh ! my own baby, don't you know me ?'

He did not know me. How should he ?—the baby boy from whom I had been parted for a whole year.

I knew my appeal to his three-year-old intelligence was beyond all reason, and yet I went on crying to him out of the deep of my anguished motherhood.

My little child lifted the tiny hand that lay on the quilt, and made a feeble attempt to push me from him.

'Go away,' he said fretfully,—'go away, you naughty story-teller.'

Then my trembling limbs gave way, and I sank on my knees beside the little bed, moaning in the agony of a mother's soul, pierced by the sword of a child's forgetfulness.

'Hush,' said the quiet voice of the nurse in my ear, 'you cannot expect a child of his age to remember long.'

But though her voice was so quiet I saw her large eyes full of tears as I rose to my feet and looked into her pale face.

The door opened, and a tall woman came in—a tall queenly woman in magnificent winter attire, who came swiftly and softly towards the little bed.

To this woman the little child in the bed held out his little arms with a weak cry of glad welcome—

'Mother! mother! you have come back.'

'Yes, my darling,' said Helen, 'I have come back, but I must not kiss you while I am so cold.'

Then taking her eyes off the bed for the first time since she entered the room, she noticed the presence of another besides the nurse.

'Wakefield,' she said sharply, 'don't you know I never allow strangers in here?'

'I am not a stranger,' I said, turning my face towards her.

Her white face flamed.

'What is the meaning of this?' she asked.

'It means,' I said, looking at the bed where the child who called her 'mother' lay,—'it means that I heard this morning my child was ill.'

'Leave the room, Wakefield,' said the mistress of the house to the nurse.

Wakefield left the room.

'You ought not to have come,' said Helen, whose face had paled again. 'Mr. Smith will be very angry if he finds you here, and as I passed him in the hall just now, I suppose he is coming up to see how the child is.'

Even as she spoke the door opened again, and my father-in-law entered.

Eugene's child did not turn towards his grand-

father with any sign of welcome, but lay with large eyes of loving content fixed on the face of his grandfather's wife.

'Is he any better to-night?' asked Pepper Smith, lingering by the door.

His voice was milder than of yore, and he looked strangely old and worn for a man so little past his prime.

'I can't say,' his wife answered coldly. 'I have just been to see what that doctor meant by not coming to-day, and found he had gone to Birmingham, and would not be home for another hour. What did he mean by going to Birmingham when he was wanted here?'

She asked the last question fiercely, as if calling her husband to account for the doctor's absence.

'I suppose,' he answered in a meekly hesitating voice, strangely unlike Pepper Smith's own,—'I suppose he was summoned to Birmingham on a consultation.'

A movement under the sealskin mantle Mrs. Pepper Smith had not yet removed from her shoulders suggested her unspeakable contempt for the Birmingham consultation.

'Do you see Rosamund?' she asked.

If my father-in-law had seen me he had evidently not recognised me, for he started at the sound of my name.

'I thought it was the nurse,' he said, nervously fingering the ribbon of the eyeglass, which, however, he did not raise to his eye. 'Why is Rosamund here?'

His voice shook, but not, I thought, with the anger of which I had been warned.

Mrs. Pepper Smith answered her husband with something more than the old-time Mary Ellen Kelly sharpness in her tone—a tone that he had never heard in Helen Bratton's voice—

'Rosamund is here because she thought proper to come, and she will stay here as long as I choose to let her. If you don't want to stay in the room with your daughter-in-law, Mr. Smith, you can go out of it. There are other rooms in the house.'

The master of the house hesitated for a moment, and then left the room without another word.

'Mother,' said the little weak voice from the bed, 'take off your things.'

'Yes, darling,' said Helen, hastily throwing off her sealskin mantle and stylish bonnet. 'Now, you see mother is not going out any more.' Then turning to me—'Take off your things too, and we will have some tea. Oh, you needn't say you don't want any, because you do. You look half dead, and if you want to help me to nurse, you must be all alive. I take all my meals up here now, and when I sleep at all I sleep there,'—pointing to a larger bed beside the little one—'so we will have our tea together, unless you would rather go down and dine with your dear father-in-law.' ~

I had no spirit left in me to meet this last sarcasm, and Helen continued her discourse with her hand on the bell.

'He dines late now. I make him. You remember how he used to dine early on principle, don't you? He used to object to butlers on principle, but you saw a butler in the hall, didn't you? Mr. Pepper Smith is not exactly the man he was at

Bryn Hall. I believe in adaptability as much as ever I did, but instead of adapting myself to Mr. Pepper Smith, I make Mr. Pepper Smith adapt himself to me, and that makes all the difference.'

She spoke with an affectation of airiness that did not even then deceive me, and that seems to me pathetic now, as through the softening mist of years I see the white face, wasted and lined with watching nights and restless days, continually turning towards the little child on the little bed.

'Helen,' I said imploringly, 'will you not persuade my child to let me kiss him?'

She bent over the little bed, and laid a large caressing hand on the little head.

'Percy, my dearest, let the nice lady kiss you.'

'Lady not nice,' said Percy, as his own small hand moved towards the haggard face on which his big eyes looked lovingly. 'Lady tells naughty stories. Percy won't have a kiss from a naughty story-teller.'

'Percy will let the lady kiss him because mother says he must,' said Helen, with softly sweet decision.

My child offered no more resistance, but lay perfectly still while I kissed him. Then he raised a feeble little hand and drew it across the mouth my lips had pressed.

'Percy wipe it off,' he said, with his eyes again on Helen's face.

'He always wipes off any kiss but mine,' said Helen, looking at me with a sudden light in her eyes. 'I am more than all the world to him, and you ought not to grudge me his love. I have made him a happy little child, and if you loved him un-

selfishly you would be glad of his happiness in me. "Love seeketh not her own." Is not this the Gospel ?

'Yes,' I said bitterly, 'but it is a hard Gospel as you preach it just now.'

'Of course it is hard,' said Helen in the voice of old familiar coldness. 'Life is full of hard things, and there may be harder things than you know of. Here is tea, and I am parched.'

She drank her tea beside Percy's bed, while I, sitting afar off, held mine untasted, with a soul athirst for the love that shone out of my child's eyes on the woman he called mother.

'What are you doing for your living ?' she asked as she brought her empty cup to the little tea-table near me.

'I am governess in a genteel boarding school,' I answered, mechanically quoting Miss Hogge's advertisement.

'You look like it, my dear,' she said in a once familiar tone ; 'that is to say, you look forty years old. Your genteel boarding school has added twenty years to your appearance, as Mrs. Todgers said about the gravy.'

Then as if the quotation from *Martin Chuzzlewit* suggested a name often associated with Dickens in the Llandhul days, she asked—'Have you seen John Westropp since ?'

'Yes, I saw him' (here I paused, stupidly wondering how long it was since I read Morgan's letter about my sick child)—'I saw him—I think it was only yesterday.'

'Only yesterday,' repeated Helen, standing before me. 'He must have thought you horribly changed.'

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘he thought me horribly changed.’

There was no emotion of vanity within me now, as I sat in the room with the little child who had wiped off my kiss.

‘No doubt he was very sorry for you,’ said Helen as she poured herself out another cup of tea.

‘Very sorry,’ I said in the same mechanical tone in which I had answered all her other questions.

‘John Westropp is the soul of chivalry,’ said Helen in her old-time tone of sarcasm. ‘Was he knight-errant enough to offer to marry you?’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘he was.’

‘And are you going to marry him?’ she asked suddenly, gripping my shoulder.

Her hand was strong, and the shoulder it gripped was only thinly covered, but I had no sense of pain at that moment, and afterwards I had no attention to spare to a blackened skin.

‘I am not going to marry him,’ I said.

She loosed her grip, and taking her cup of tea from the table, emptied it like one in feverish thirst.

Then she went over again to the little bed, and bent over the little child lying there.

‘Percy, my own love,’ she said, ‘tell me that you love me best of the whole world.’

‘I love you best of the whole world,’ said the little weak voice in its wonderfully plain English.

Once more Helen looked at me with the light in her eyes that had flashed into them when my child had wiped off my kiss.

Then, as the little yellow head moved more and

more restlessly on the white pillow, the watching woman's face clouded darkly, and she rang the bell violently.

'Why does not the doctor come?' she asked fiercely when the nurse appeared. 'He must have returned from Birmingham long ago, but I suppose the unfeeling beast is waiting to eat his dinner. Tell your master to go for him, Wakefield. He said last night he could do no more than Dr. Robinson had already done, but he can do more if he isn't a fool. What's the use of a great London specialist if he can't do something special for a small child?'

The great specialist came at last, and looked sadly at the child, and sympathetically at the woman he supposed to be the child's mother.

'Oh, why can't you doctors do more?' asked Helen, fiercely clutching his arm as he was going away in evidently sincere sorrow for her.

'We do our best,' he said gently, 'but it is only a poor human best, and none of us can work divine miracles.'

His kind eyes did not look towards me. If he saw me at all I suppose he thought I was an under nurse who needed even less sympathy than Wakefield.

'Rosamund,' said Helen, when she had ordered her husband and the nurse to leave us alone with the dying child, 'this is not the first time you and I have watched him together, but it will be the last.'

After that there was silence between us as we watched together, she absorbing whatever faint rays of love lingered in my child's eyes—I in the darkness, where there was no light at all.

'Mother,' said the little panting voice at midnight, 'mother put me in your bed.'

A great shudder passed over her as she took the light burden in her strong arms.

'Are you very tired, my dearest?' she asked as she laid the little panting body in her larger bed.

'Very—tired,' murmured the small weak voice.

Then Helen, in a voice of wonderful sweetness, told of the Good Shepherd who would soon carry home His little tired lamb.

'You—come—too?' questioned the child in a gasping drowsy voice.

The woman's voice that had hitherto been so bravely steady was broken as she answered—

'Yes, I will come too—if He will let me.'

'You—too—big—to—carry,' gasped the drowsy little voice, 'but—you—walk—after.'

'Oh yes, my darling,' cried Helen, falling on her knees. 'With His help I will walk after Him and you.'

For another hour we watched beside the unconscious gasping body of the child who had been dead to me for a year.

Then in the early Christmas morning the shadow of the coming Shepherd passed over the little face, and the weary lamb was at rest in His arms.

—

CHAPTER VI

'YET ALIVE'

THEY come back to me like the memory of a dark dream, those Christmastide days before the Festival of the Holy Innocents which Helen had appointed for the burial.

'I wonder was there ever a woman in Rama who wept like me for another woman's child,' she said on one of those days as we stood together beside the child who 'was not.'

Then she suddenly raised her sunken eyes from the white flowers she was strewing on the bed to which she had once carried the tired little body that now lay restfully there.

'Go away,' she said, pushing me to the door; 'I have a battle to fight that can only be fought here and alone. Go away, I tell you. It will be good for you if I win.'

I did not think anything in this world would be good for me, but at that moment I had no resisting power of body or mind.

As I went to the room that had been assigned to me I met my father-in-law walking with slow steps and bowed head towards the door that had just

been closed on me. He lifted his eyes as I neared him, and looked as if he would have spoken, but passed on without a word.

Then I heard him knocking in vain at the locked door, and I wondered if he remembered the time when he had been deaf to my pleading for admission to another chamber of death.

On the Feast of the Holy Innocents three mourners, who spoke no word to each other on the way, followed the little coffin covered with white wreaths and crosses, made by Helen's hand, to the grave she had chosen in the churchyard of a London suburb.

'I prefer churchyards to cemeteries,' she had said in answer to the suggestion of Eugene's father that Eugene's child should be taken to the Welsh cemetery where Eugene lay, 'and I will have my darling as near me as I can.'

Eugene's father seemed as powerless to dispute her sole proprietorship as Eugene's wife, and he raised no objection to the London churchyard, though it surrounded a church to which he would once have objected.

Neither did he protest against the white-robed choir boys who stood round the little grave and sang of the Holy Innocents.

Perhaps, like me, he thought that so Eugene would have wished those white-robed boys to sing round his own boy's grave.

We returned to the house as silently as we had left it, and it was only when we were in the hall again that Helen spoke.

'Rosamund, when you have taken off your

bonnet come to the nursery. I wish you to come too,' she said, addressing her husband with the air of a woman whose wish was law.

In a few minutes I was in the nursery, where there was no child to be nursed, and found my father-in-law already there.

He was sitting with his face to a window, where all that was left of December daylight showed that face strangely withered for its little more than fifty years.

He looked round as I entered, and, as on that other day of our meeting alone, seemed inclined to speak, but did not.

Then Helen, looking deadly pale in her mourning dress, came in, holding something that looked like a letter.

She locked the door behind her, and then bending over the bed where we had last stood together, she kissed the pillow that still bore the impression of the little head.

'I would not have it smoothed out,' she said softly to me. Then she addressed her husband in a louder, harder voice, a voice strangely different to that in which she had spoken of the Good Shepherd to a little tired child.

'Mr. Smith, you probably remember the last occasion on which you and Rosamund and I were together after a funeral?'

'You can scarcely think I have forgotten it,' he said, steadily staring out of the window.

'You were very miserable then,' continued Helen in the same hard voice,—'far more miserable than you were in the churchyard to-day.'

'Yes, I was,' said Pepper Smith, not turning his face from the window, 'and I did well to be miserable. If there was any meaning in all that singing about Holy Innocents to-day, nobody need sorrow without hope for the death of a child, but what hope is there in the death of a man who died like my son?'

'You are unreasonable,' said his wife coldly.

Pepper Smith turned his prematurely aged face towards her, and answered in something like the voice of his more self-assertive days.

'I think, Helen, you ought to know by this time how impossible it is for any reasoning to reconcile me to the manner of my son's death.'

'You think the manner of your son's death was suicide,' said Helen Smith in the voice so different from the voice in which Helen Bratton used to speak to him, 'but the coroner's jury thought he was accidentally killed by rushing across the line at St. Winnifred to take a ticket to Llanroch.'

'Why do you bring up coroner's juries?' asked Pepper Smith in a voice that now trembled with anger. 'I tell you now, as I told you before, that the coroner's jury knew nothing about my son's miserable state of mind. The coroner's jury did not ask what I have been asking myself all this miserable year, what I shall keep on asking myself to the day of my death—why did my son take that weary walk to St. Winnifred on a bitter winter day? Why should he go to Llanroch, where he had never been and knew nobody, instead of coming to meet me at Manchester?'

'This,' said Helen, who, while her husband was speaking, had taken a paper from the envelope in her hand, 'this is a letter of sympathy that came to you at Christmas last year. You could not bear to look at letters of sympathy, don't you know? and you asked me to keep them all out of your sight, don't you remember? I thought it would only be civil to the writers to answer their well-meant effusions before I burnt them, and of course I had to read them first. This I did not burn. I kept it because I meant to show it to you some time before you or I died, and now the time has come. Read it.'

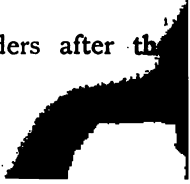
He adjusted his eyeglass without any apparent interest in what she put into his hand, but with the mechanical obedience to which a year's training had reduced him.

'Benedict,' he said, reading the signature first. 'Pray, who may the writer of this be—a peer of the realm?'

'There is no peer of this realm who bears the title of Benedict,' said Helen coldly. 'The writer of that letter is the Reverend Arthur Lester, who is known in the Anglo-Catholic world as Father Benedict.'

'Indeed?' said Pepper Smith, with the ghost of his old contemptuous smile. 'I suppose a Church of England clergyman whose Christian name is Arthur, and whose surname is Lester, has some reason for signing himself Benedict, but I must say I fail to see it.'

Helen Smith shrugged her shoulders after the manner of Helen Bratton.



'You always failed to see the reason of Anglican monasteries, didn't you, Mr. Smith? and I did not ask you to come here this afternoon for enlightenment on the modern Anglican position. Rosamund,' turning to me, 'do you remember Father Benedict?'

'Yes, yes,' I cried, dizzy with the light that had suddenly flashed on me. 'Oh, can it be that Eugene was on his way that day to Father Benedict's monastery?'

Then, with all fear of my father-in-law subdued by a stronger emotion, I rushed to his side entreating, 'Read, read.'

'What does all this mean?' asked Pepper Smith faintly as the letter shook in his hand.

'Let Rosamund read it,' said Helen, taking the letter from him and giving it to me.

Trembling in every limb, I read Father Benedict's letter as distinctly as I could to my father-in-law.

ST. SIMEON STYLITES' ABBEY,
Christmas Day 18—.

MY DEAR AFFLICTED BROTHER—I do not write now to intrude the sympathy of a stranger on you, but to enclose a letter that will, I believe, soothe your sorrow as no other earthly words could do.

I received it from your dear son some days ago, and was in continual expectation of his intended visit till I heard of the awful death that met him in the midst of life.

News from the outer world travels slowly to this mountain retreat, and I only heard this most painful news from a young chorister of St. Winnifred's Cathedral who came to see me yesterday.

I vividly remember the young man with whom I talked in Liverpool three years ago, and his memory has often been suggestive of that other young man on whom the Master looked with love.

I have been sadly shocked by the news of his sudden and terrible death, but the darkness of my sorrow is lightened by a sure and certain hope.

To you in your infinitely greater sorrow may this hope come with healing power.—Yours faithfully in Him who was born this day to bear our griefs,

BENEDICT.

I could not see my father-in-law's face through the mist of my own eyes, I could only hear his shaking voice—

‘Where is my son's letter?’

‘Here,’ said the steady voice of his wife; ‘Rosa-mund, control yourself and read it.’

Under the influence of her coldly commanding voice I controlled myself to read the letter written by Eugene on the last day of his life:—

BRYN HALL, LLANDHUL,
15th December 18—.

REVEREND FATHER—You have probably forgotten the Eugene Smith for whom you obtained the shelter of St. Monica's Clergy House one night more than three years ago; but he has not forgotten your kindness, and now turns to you for help in another time of need. It is only within the last hour that the idea of seeking your help has occurred to me, and only within the last few minutes that I have decided to write and tell you the object of my visit. I write beforehand for the following two reasons:—that you might deny me an interview if I ventured to seek your sacred solitude without warning, and I might be



possibility of any cowardly reserve that might check the flow of my free speech with you.

According to your advice, more than three years ago, I told my father the whole truth about the visit of my cousin Rosamund and myself to St. Monica's, and the confession resulted in a marriage insisted on by my father.

My cousin Rosamund was not willing to marry me, and I would have been content with our brotherly and sisterly affection, but my father was so firm—oh, so terribly firm—in his resolve that we should not return home unmarried, that Rosamund, to save me from the consequences of his anger, consented to be my wife.

It has been a happy marriage to me at least. I love my sweet wife as I love no other earthly being but the father who will always be my best beloved, and for the last two years I have had a little son to teach me another kind of love. We have a beautiful home life with my beloved father, who seeks my happiness now as he ever did, and yet since August last I have been miserable—oh, so miserable!

Do not despise me, Reverend Father, when I tell you the reason of my misery. Since my childhood I have delighted in beauty, and the knowledge that I myself was beautiful was delightful to me. I believe learned people are often puzzled over many problems of life. I am not learned, and the only thing that ever perplexed me was the existence of ugliness in God's beautiful world. I wished so earnestly that He had made all people beautiful, for it seemed to me that without beauty none could be happy, and I longed for universal happiness.

I know I have been despised as effeminate by my fellow-men; but I was never ashamed of my effeminacy. Woman being more beautiful than man, I did not seek to disguise such of my sentiments as were womanly.

Often, as I gave thanks to the Giver for His gift of beauty, I prayed that He would mercifully deliver me from all disfiguring diseases, and call me to Himself before my face was marred by the wrinkles of age.

Reverend Father, I see condemnation of this prayer in your eyes as you read this, and I hasten to assure you that it is now condemned by my own penitent heart.

I have dwelt on my own inordinate love of beauty, so that you may in some measure understand my feelings when one bright August morning my mirror showed slight, but to me startling signs of a coming change in my appearance. The flesh tints of my face had lost some of their freshness, and there were lines on my brow that I had never noticed before. Very faint lines, and perhaps scarcely perceptible to less anxiously interested eyes than my own, but to me as full of dreadful warning as the handwriting on Belshazzar's wall.

As the day wore on I calmed myself with the thought that my fancy had exaggerated their importance, and I had partly recovered from the shock when an old family friend, Mr. Westropp, who was passing through Llandhul that day, called at Bryn Hall. In the course of general conversation, without any intention of giving me offence, Mr. Westropp commented on my appearance in a way that at that time was most offensive to me.

Three years had passed since our last meeting, and it was only natural that he should find me older ; but I was in an unreasonable mood that day, and when he made a laughing remark about the wrinkles of time, I was alarmed by the thought that he had noticed the lines on my brow.

In what was the real agony of my mind I made a wretched exhibition of temper that surprised every one at the table. No one, of course, guessed the cause of my anger—I would have been even more miserable if any one had guessed it,—and John Westropp, who had been a kind friend to me from childhood, went away in grievous perplexity.

Then followed miserable days, during which I was constantly drawn by a fearful fascination to the mirror that showed the dreadful lines more and more plainly, and miserable nights, in which I dreamed of myself blighted by premature age.

Had I been older I thought I could have borne my misery better ; but it was unbearable to see the beginning of the end at twenty-five.

My wife, alarmed at my wretched looks, begged me to tell her the cause of my misery ; but I knew she did not value physical beauty as I did, and feeling sure that her comprehension would fail to reach the depth of my misery, I repulsed her sympathy.

It was to another woman I turned for sympathy. She was my wife's companion before our marriage, and continues to reside at Bryn Hall. She is a lady of remarkably fine perception, and, guessing the cause of my unhappiness, she invited my confidence with a delicate tact I could not resist. We talked much together, and while she showed a deep sympathy with my fears, she soothed me with hopes of averting the calamity that overshadowed me.

Together we read all the advertisements of cosmetics that were guaranteed to repair injuries to the skin, and having made certain selections from these, Miss Bratton secretly procured them for me, and I as secretly used them. At first the effect delighted me, and I was happy again in what I believed to be the restoration of my beauty. But soon they lost their effect, and I saw myself none the better, but, as I thought, much the worse for their use. Then I gave way to despair, and my life became a burden too heavy for me to bear.

I no longer took delight in what had once delighted me. All the beautiful things in God's world gave me no pleasure, because I was no longer in harmony with them. Art and poetry had lost their charm for me now that I had neither part nor lot in the beauty of which they were the interpreters.

The sorrows of the poor no longer moved my heart. The only sorrow I could understand was the loss of the beauty that could not be restored by a world's wealth, and I had no sympathy to spare for the hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness that could be remedied by money.

I shunned the society of my friends, fearing their com-

ments on my changed appearance. I could not bear to see any eyes turned on the face I longed to hide from all.

Again and again my wife begged me to open my grief to her, but I rejected her sweetly-offered sympathy with a rudeness of which I am now bitterly repentful.

Even my love for my little son was clouded by an insane jealousy of his baby skin, and I alienated his love by my ill-temper.

All this time my father had not appeared to notice the change that perplexed my wife so much. He was unusually absorbed in business, and my only strong efforts to conquer my despondency were made in his presence.


But last Sunday, as we sat at the dinner-table, he for the first time noticed my changed looks, and made an anxious remark. My tortured mind had now become so sensitive to such remarks that I shrank from them with positive pain, and, excited by the strong wine of which I had drank, I spoke as no son should speak to a father—as I of all sons should not have spoken.

I had scarcely left my father's presence before I came to myself.

Alone with the guilt of my first ungrateful words to a loving father fresh upon me, the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw the ugliness of my own heart.

That spiritual revelation was more appalling than the first discovery of physical decay, and through the days and nights that I have since passed I have stretched forth my arms to Heaven for help to cast down the false god I have ignorantly worshipped, and raise an altar in my swept and garnished soul for the worship of true beauty.

This morning my father forgave me what I cannot forgive myself, and in the fulness of the love of which I am so unworthy suggested a trip to London that he thought would give me pleasure, and offered to accompany me on Sunday to St. Alban's or All Saints'. This last concession of one who has a personal objection to such churches touched me deeply, and though I did not at that moment decide on going to London, my mind was



up for the journey half an hour after my father's departure for Manchester, where I was to meet him if I felt inclined to follow by the next train.

Then I remembered you and your wonderful sermon on 'The King in His Beauty,' and my soul was filled with desire and longing to seek your counsel for the future, in which I hope to find a new and better way than the old path of vanity.

My father's offer to accompany me to either of the London churches I have named proved his willingness to let me seek the help that seems to me most helpful, and I have no fear of his displeasure when I tell him on his return of my visit to you.

I intend to inform him by telegram that I am not going to London with him, and then to walk to St. Winnifred Station, which I hope to reach in time for the afternoon train to Llanroch.

I have hitherto been too self-indulgent, and desire to train myself into greater endurance of hardness. For this reason I intend walking as much of the way as possible, so that my journey to you may have something of the roughness of a pilgrimage. As I might lose my way among the mountains after dark, I will stay at Llanroch to-night, and continue my pilgrimage early in the morning.

My wife knows nothing of my intention, but will suppose me with my father in London, till I return in the peace that I trust through your prayers may be given to me.

If I fail to catch the afternoon train to Llanroch I must postpone my journey, as I could not return on Sunday, and might not be home before my father on Monday evening.

I do not think, however, that I shall be late at St. Winnifred Station, as, if I have calculated correctly, I have ample time for the walk.

To-morrow then, Reverend Father, I hope you will teach me how to take up the cross of ugliness, and walk in the way that will lead me at last to the King in His Beauty.
—Yours obediently,

EUGENE SMITH.

There was silence in the room for a few moments, and then the sound of a great sob. It was from Eugene's father, whose face was buried in his hands.

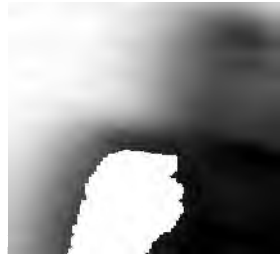
There was no other sound for some moments, and then a trembling voice rose—

'God, I thank Thee that Eugene, my son, is yet alive.'

After another silence Eugene's father stretched out his hands to me.

'Rosamund,' said the trembling voice, 'I did you a great wrong when I killed your father, I did you a greater wrong when I accused you of killing my son. Oh, my poor ill-used child, can you ever forgive me?'

'Father,' I said, with my arms round his neck, 'let there be no talk of forgiveness between us, but let us love each other for Eugene's sake.'



CHAPTER VII

HELEN'S CONFESSION

IT was all as clear as daylight now—the painful mystery of Eugene's death, that I never in this life hoped to read aright.

Eugene, no doubt tired of a walk that had often tired strong men, had probably walked the last mile with difficulty, and just arrived at St. Winnifred as the Llanroch train was steaming into the station. Knowing it was the last train that day, and how almost immediately it would start again, and fearing to lose it if he crossed the bridge to the ticket office, he had, on the impulse of an excited moment, tried to rush across the line, and been knocked down by the engine before he could clear the deadly way.

Eugene had not sought a terrible death as an escape from the misery of his heart, but met that death on his way to seek what he thought would be the best counsel for a new life.

'Helen,' said the father, who was now rejoicing as in a resurrection from the dead, 'how could you keep the truth from me so long? I could have borne my son's death if I had hope of his after life,

but I could not bear it without this hope. Had you no pity for me or my daughter ?'

As he asked the last question the fatherliness of my father-in-law's tone sank deeply into my heart.

'I don't think I ever had much pity for any one but myself,' said Helen, who was again standing by the bed where the unsmoothed pillow lay. 'No one ever pitied me, and where nothing is given, nothing is required. I don't think it becomes you to talk of pity, Mr. Smith'—here she turned away from the bed and faced him defiantly. 'Where was your pity when you sent your daughter, as you are now pleased to call her, to wander as a fugitive and a vagabond over the face of the earth, where poverty is even a greater inconvenience than it was in the days of Cain ?'

'I was pitiless,' said Eugene's father, with his trembling arm around me. 'God forgive me, I knew not what I did. But you knew what I was doing, Helen. Even before this letter of Benedict's came you must have known.'

'I knew your son's wife was guiltless of your son's death,' said Helen, with a calm that, if not real, was wonderfully well assumed, 'but I could not pity her, because she had taken everything I wanted from me. Yes, you did,' suddenly losing her calm and speaking to me like the Mary Ellen Kelly of my childish memory ; 'you were always in my road, as I told you long ago. I was the most important person in Mrs. Kelly's house till Michael Murphy brought you along, and then all the lodgers took to petting you because you were an orphan, and because you were pretty. I was a worse sort of orphan

than you if they had only known it, and if I wasn't pretty it wasn't my fault. Even the woman I called my mother seemed to think more of you for the few weeks you were with her than she thought of me, who had been with her all my life. Of course, I was too big to be nursed like you, but for all that I couldn't bear to see you on her lap. Of all things I hated the talk about your beautiful curly hair. I used to think my own hair curled beautifully when it was well papered, but no one ever seemed to admire it. Mrs. Kelly's friends and neighbours were not educated up to an artistic appreciation of red hair, and their ignorant prejudice naturally annoyed me. Even Mrs. Kelly, who always tried to make the best of me, constantly irritated me with her laments about my "misfortunate foxiness," as she called it, and my playmates were fond of jokes about "carrots" till I taught them to let that sort of fun alone when their own wigs were near my hands. One night, when you were asleep on Mrs. Kelly's lap, one of the lodgers who had been to the pantomime said you were for all the world like the sleeping beauty, and I wished with all my heart at that moment that John Darker had killed you along with your father.'

'Oh, Helen, don't,' I cried, as my father-in-law buried his face in his hands. 'Why need you hurt him like this?'

'I have made a vow to tell the whole truth,' she answered in a voice that was once more cold and steady, 'and the telling hurts me more than it can possibly hurt any one else, but, as I said just now, no one has ever pitied me. Pray, Mr. Smith, have

you ever noticed the gray hairs in Rosamund's head ?'

'Yes,' he said, uplifting his head to look at me. 'I remember asking her once what was the reason of them, and she said they were caused by a fright in her childhood. I did not question her further'—his voice lowered and trembled—'because I thought she alluded to the fright of her father's death.'

'Another of your mistakes, Mr. Smith,' said Mrs. Smith in the tone so different from that in which Miss Bratton had been wont to bear testimony to her dear Mr. Smith's infallibility. 'Rosamund's curls were not affected by her father's death, but they slightly changed colour one night when I presented John Darker to her youthful imagination as a roaring lion who was seeking to devour her. Even in those early days I had a certain dramatic power, and she had a credulous mind. I left her alone in the dark to think of the roaring lion, and her curls suffered.'

'Poor child !' murmured the man who had made me fatherless, in a voice as pitiful as any father's, and all the more pathetic because of its self-reproach. 'Poor little child !'

'Oh yes, pity her,' said Helen harshly ; 'by all means pity the little child who had her pretty curls spoiled, but don't on any account pity the big child who was miserable because she thought her curls ugly. Pepper Smith, your son was the only human being who had beauty? Do you not know how his inward and spiritual beauty showed by his outward and visible

would have been the sweet-tempered Eugene he was if he had been a red-haired, freckled boy? Do you think it was easier for a red-haired, freckled girl, who was also a beauty-worshipper, to be sweet-tempered?’

‘I think,’ said Pepper Smith, with a gentleness of voice that softened the dogmatic sentiment, ‘I think that inward beauty ought to be the cause and not the effect of outward beauty, and I am thankful to know that this truth was at last clear to my dear son.’

As Eugene’s father spoke the last words there was a light on his face that I mutely besought his wife not to cloud by any sarcastic comment.

‘You need not be afraid, Rosamund,’ she said, reading what was in my imploring eyes as readily as a printed prayer; ‘I am not quite so particularly nasty as all that.’

She was silent for a few moments, and then addressed her husband.

‘You may not be aware, Mr. Smith, that when Rosamund Smith Plunkett made my acquaintance I was known to the society in which I moved as Mary Ellen Kelly.’

‘No,’ said Pepper Smith, who seemed too much absorbed in the great thought of his heart to be much interested in lesser questions. ‘I never knew anything of your life but what you told me yourself, and that was very little. You told me you were a doctor’s daughter and a Dean’s granddaughter, and that satisfied me.’

‘You are generally accurate in your statements, Mr. Smith,’ said his wife, with a tiny cold smile, ‘but when you say I told you I was a Dean’s grand-

daughter you are not quite accurate. However, more about this later on. Rosamund, my dear, I am sure you were surprised at the translation of Mary Ellen Kelly into Miss Helen Bratton, but you were not more surprised than I was when a red-nosed gentleman appeared one fine day in Mrs. Kelly's parlour and introduced himself as my father. I did not know till then that I had a father on this side of the grave, and the surprise of finding myself a gentleman's daughter was pleasant, even if the gentleman had a red nose. It was just as surprising to be told that Mrs. Kelly was not my mother, and that surprise was also pleasant, as I supposed my mother was a lady, and a dead lady was better than a living Mrs. Kelly. I was curious about that dead mother of mine, but when I found that my curiosity could only be satisfied at the expense of my pride, I stopped asking questions. I believe she was an actress, who died, like the youth in Gray's "Elegy," "to fortune and to fame unknown," and that her name was Nelly Dean. You look startled, Mr. Smith, but not so shocked as you would have looked a few years ago if you had been informed that my maternal grandfather was not a dean of the Church of England, but a stage carpenter, whose surname was Dean. I knew by the tone of your advertisement what sort of an answer would best suit you, so I wrote my mother down as the daughter of a Dean, which was literally true, though it conveyed, as I intended it should, the false idea that my grandfather was a clergyman.

Pepper Smith looked at me with the disapproval of a naturally

‘How could you be so deceitful, Helen?’ he asked reproachfully.

For answer she flung back a contemptuous question.

‘Why did Pepper Smith not proclaim the truth about John Darker from the respectable housetop of Bryn Hall?’

The man thus reminded of the burden once borne in secret, dropped his eyes and was silent.

‘You remember the pearls you were so curious about, Rosamund?’ said Helen, addressing herself to me again. ‘I told you they had come to me from my ancestress Mary Stuart. Well, so they did—in a way. My mother appeared once as Mary Stuart in a country theatre, and these pearls were among her stage jewels. Now, you see, my royal descent is as clearly proved as my ecclesiastical connection.’

She tried to speak with reckless indifference, but I, who knew every note in her voice, felt that Helen had laid on herself no painless penance when she had bound herself to make this confession.

‘Loving you as I did, my dear Rosey,’ she went on, ‘you may imagine my feelings when that Irish schoolmaster was going to slap you for not calling me “miss.” I thought a taste of Mr. Malone’s stick would do you all the good in the world, and I would have given all the feathers out of my hat to see you getting it hot. But Michael Murphy came just in time to spoil my sport, and turned the fun in quite another direction, as you, no doubt, remember. Then you had scarlatina, and my father drove me so wild with his morning-noon-and-night talk about his little pet patient, as he called you, that I wished you were

dead, and said so. I was delighted to hear that your curls had been cut off, and was only sorry that the scarlatina could not make you so ugly as the smallpox. When Michael Murphy died, my father, in the fulness of his sympathy, would have had you to stay with us, but I let my temper fly in a way that frightened him out of the notion of bringing you and your infection into the house with me. I had not yet seriously commenced the cultivation of repose, and my manners in times of excitement were such as I had acquired in a Liverpool back street. When Dr. Foley came back to Castlerock we left the dirty mud-hole it was so absurd to call a city, and started for Liverpool, where my father thought he saw his way to a practice. As we drove past Michael Murphy's old shop Dr. Bratton's eyes were even more watery than usual, and I supposed he was feeling sentimental about his little pet patient. Emotion is not becoming to a red-nosed gentleman the day after a farewell dinner party, and I candidly told my emotional parent what I thought of his appearance that cold and frosty morning. He did not take my remarks kindly, and began to make odious comparisons between girls who could not give a civil word to their own fathers, and children who were breaking their dear little hearts about people who were no relation to them. Then I began to make comparisons of my own, between fathers who did not own their girls for more than a dozen years, and other men who were better than fathers to children of their own, and so, as usual in his arguments, Dr. Bratton was shut up. No doubt the vulgarity of that very ex-

pressive expression "shut up" is offensive to your refined ear. Pray, pardon an unconscious relapse into my earlier style.'

'You must be tired standing,' said her husband, taking no notice of her sarcastic apology; 'why don't you sit down?'

'Because I choose to stand,' she answered, with all the sharpness of what she had just called her earlier style. 'Pepper Smith, do you know why I went to Bryn Hall? Do you know why Joseph's brethren put him into the pit?'


'I do not see the connection between the questions,' said Pepper Smith, looking uneasily at the questioner.

'I did not think you would,' said Mrs. Pepper Smith drily. 'You are not always so clear-sighted as a business man might be, are you? And you object to Scripture riddles on principle, don't you? Well, Joseph's brethren put him into the pit because they thought it was a good opening for a young man, and I went to Bryn Hall because I thought it was a good opening for a young woman. In plain English, Pepper Smith, I went to Bryn Hall with the intention of making myself its mistress, either as your son's wife or your own. The young lady who was in want of a companion was only a secondary, or rather, I should say, a thirdary consideration. I heard that Pepper Smith who advertised for a young lady's companion was a widower with an only son, and I went to Bryn Hall with the intention of marrying the father or the son—the son, of course, preferred.'

'Helen,' said Pepper Smith in something like his

old masterful voice, 'do not talk in this unwomanly way.'

'It is a wonder you did not say unladylike,' she answered, with a little laugh that sounded strangely through what had so lately been a death chamber. 'You are improving, Pepper Smith. Perhaps you will not die an impenitent prig after all. I used to think you were hopeless. It is a comfort to think that I shall leave you in a state of grace. Oh yes, I am going to leave you, but I have not come to that part of my story yet. Well, as I was saying, I went to Bryn Hall on matrimony intent. I had been intent on that same ever since my father left me penniless, with an education that I had to finish for myself with labour and sorrow as a pupil teacher in my seventeenth year, but circumstances had not been favourable to my intention. I had learned to be fairly content with my personal appearance. I knew that what the vulgar called carrot hair was the artist's delight, and the novelists of that day were partial to red-haired heroines. Care and cosmetics relieved me in time of my freckles, my figure was good, and I cultivated the manner that men call charming. I was quite as ambitious as your dearly-beloved Amelia, Mr. Smith, but rather more practical. I knew that Lords of Burleigh did not often come in the way of Liverpool governesses, so I limited my ambition to merchant princes. However, such of these as I met in the course of my employment were protected from designing governesses by their female relatives or their own snobbishness, and I never felt that life had given me a fair chance till I found myself at Bryn Hall. Yet I had not been



two hours at Bryn Hall till the ambition of my life was lost in the pure joy of John Westropp's society. You are beginning to look animated, Mr. Smith. This part of my story is more surprising to you than to Rosamund. I daresay you both remember John Westropp smashing a glass ornament that he had to replace at a cost of thirty shillings, and, of course, you both thought the smash accidental. I knew that the man with the beautiful brown eyes had been quick-sighted enough to see my confusion when that horrid old Colonel Gunn said he didn't know Joe Bratton was a married man, and that he had smashed that chimney ornament with a chivalrous purpose. It is not wonderful that I felt grateful to a man who had cheerfully sacrificed thirty shillings to save me from embarrassment when I did not know another human being who would give thirty pence to save me from hanging. Before that evening was over I knew there was only one man in the world for me. I did not know whether he was poor or rich, and I did not care. For the first time in my struggling life I felt that there was a poverty in which a woman might be rich, and a wealth in which she might be poor. Yes, John Westropp might have made me the woman God meant me to be if he had only loved me, but he did not love me. I had not seen him many times before I knew that he could not love me because Rosamund Smith Plunkett was in my road. I could not understand it then—I cannot understand it now. I believed that if ever man and woman were specially suited to each other, that man and that woman were John Westropp and Helen Bratton. I felt so

sure of this at first that I did not seriously trouble myself about such a piece of bread-and-butter school-girl conventionality as Rosamund Smith Plunkett. Some men can live on bread and butter, but I did not think John Westropp was the man to be satisfied with that sort of diet. However, I had reason to believe myself mistaken, and though I could not love John Westropp less, I did not love Rosamund Smith Plunkett more. When I suspected him of being really John Darker I was comforted by the thought that no man with a conscience could make love to the daughter of the man he had slain, and I believed John Westropp had a conscience. So I was full of indignation that was partly honest when I came on the love scene in Bryn Hall porch, and apart from any personal motives, I would have considered it my duty to tell one of the lovers what I believed to be the truth about the other, though naturally the personal motives made my sense of duty all the stronger. Well, my dear Rosamund, I was as successful as I expected to be in separating you from John Westropp, and circumstances were wonderfully favourable to my hope of speedily uniting you to Eugene Smith. Now, as I still believed in John Westropp's conscience, I felt sure that a fit of remorse would follow the temporary insanity of his love-making, and that on his return from America he would be able to know that, in spite of himself, he had been deceived by future temptations. I believed that when he came to his right mind he would be the angel of his deliverance, and I recognised me as the one woman who would be when

marriages were making in Heaven. But, as you know, three years passed before I saw John Westropp again. Even then I was fool enough to hope he had at long last come to see me, and I made an excuse to leave the house with him and give him the opportunity of telling me so. When we called at the Vicarage, where I knew no one was at home, we walked on the sands for the hour he had to spare before his train started. I could repeat every word of our talk during that hour, but I will not. It is enough for my present purpose to say that I was then convinced that whoever John Darker might be he was not John Westropp, and that before we parted I was just as firmly convinced that if Helen Bratton had been the only woman in the world, John Westropp would not have loved her.'

As Helen's face flushed and paled with the unspeakable pain of this voluntary humility, I felt that the woman had suffered more than the many things I had suffered because of her.

'Mr. Smith,' she said in the tone of voice that made the name of Mrs. Smith's husband sound so strangely different from that of Miss Bratton's employer, 'you know by experience what a man feels when the woman he loves will have none of him, but neither you nor any other man can know what a woman feels when the man she loves will have none of her.'

'Helen,' said her husband, at last roused to interest in her story, 'do you mean to say that you lowered yourself so far as to make a declaration of love to John Westropp?'

'Yes,' she said, raising her head with the dignity that

truth can give to the most humiliating confession, 'I lowered myself so far, and John Westropp's refusal of my love was none the less bitter because he refused it like a gentleman. Rosamund, you saw me when I returned to Bryn Hall that day. How did you think I looked?'

'Very unhappy,' I said, remembering the bright Helen who had gone forth with John Westropp, and the haggard Helen who had returned alone.

'I was so unhappy that I was going to end my life,' she said in the calm tone of one recording a perfectly natural fact, 'and I was pondering over the various means to that end when I passed through the gate of Bryn Hall. Then a little child who was playing on the lawn ran to meet me, and told me he loved me. Do you remember this?'

'Yes,' I said, recalling the oft-remembered moment when my little child ran away from my side to welcome her return.

'I carried him in my arms to my own room,' she said in a voice that was only kept under control by an extraordinary effort. 'I held him close to my breast and made him talk to me of his love. Then I thought I could live on in a world where a little child loved me. I thought I could live on in it all the better if I had the little child all to myself, and sometimes I had wild thoughts of running away with him to some desert place where he and I might be together quite alone. But I was never so destitute of common sense, and I refused. Hagar, who lived under conditions far more favorable to desert life than I did, had never lost sight of her child in the wilderness. So

Hall and did my quiet best to detach the child who loved me more and more from every human being but myself. At last the time came when you, Rosamund, were driven out into the wilderness, and the child you left behind became all my own. Father Benedict's letter did not come till you had gone, but without it I could have cleared up the mystery of your husband's death. I knew the real cause of his misery, and remembering that Llanroch was the nearest station to Father Benedict's monastery, I at once came to the conclusion that he was on his way there when he met his death at St. Winnifred Station. I told the truth when I said that Eugene was made unhappy by John Westropp's visit, but the same truth would have had a different effect on Mr. Pepper Smith's view of his daughter-in-law if I had explained that this unhappiness was caused by what Mr. Pepper Smith himself would have called a harmless pleasantry about wrinkles. But I did not wish Mr. Pepper Smith to think anything different from his own natural thought that his daughter-in-law's former lover had provoked his son to jealousy, and so I did not make the explanation. When Father Benedict's letter came, and I read the last written words of Eugène, I was so far influenced by what good people would call my better nature as to think I could relieve the mind of Eugene's mother, and so that would have involved the relief of Eugene's father, but my worse nature prevailed. Rosamund, I wanted you to think of John Westropp as the cause of your husband's death, because I knew your better nature well enough to know that the other would not be enough to separate you from him for ever.

then if you were recalled to Bryn Hall the child would have been yours again, and I only lived to make him all my own. You had always got everything I wanted. Is it wonderful that a woman so much lower than the angels as Helen Bratton—otherwise Mary Ellen Kelly—was glad at last to get the one thing you wanted?’

‘Helen,’ I said, taking a step towards her, ‘you say no one ever pitied you——’

‘Don’t say you pity me,’ she interrupted, with her hand outstretched to stop my way to her side. ‘It is not for your pity that your enemy has licked the dust. Rosamund Smith, I have told the truth to-day because I know that no liar can enter into the kingdom of the little children, and’—her eyes turned once more towards the unsmoothed pillow—‘you heard him ask me to come.’

‘Yes,’ I said, taking another step towards her.

‘Don’t come near me,’ she said, with a sharp command in the voice that a moment ago had so nearly broken. ‘The farther apart we are the better for us both. Mr. Smith, will you go to your study and write me a cheque? I am going to relieve you of my presence, but not of my support till I see my way to self-support. I am not so sublimely scornful of your money as Rosamund was last year, and I should like you to let me know at your earliest convenience what you consider a sufficient income.’

‘That is for your consideration,’ said Pepper Smith, rising to his feet, ‘and remember, Helen, if you leave my house it is of your own free choice. I long ago found you a different woman to the Helen I thought I married, but I did not think any

woman would have been as cruel as you by your own admission have been. Still, you are my wife, and I know enough of painful confessions to give you credit for putting yourself to the pain of making one. Stay with me if you will, and let us bear with each other, as imperfect human beings ought to do.'

'No, thank you,' she said, with the genuine Mary Ellen ring in her voice. 'Don't you know, Mr. Smith, that people who want to live on the bear and forbear principle ought to love each other? When you asked me to be your wife you told me you had no love to give me, and I think I have made it clear that whatever love I have wasted was not thrown away on you. Besides, I want to do what I would have done years ago if I could—I want to go on the stage. Don't be shocked, Mr. Smith. You have seen me act many parts, but you did not know it was acting, and that showed I was a true artist, don't you know? You need not be afraid of seeing the respectable name of Mrs. Pepper Smith on a playbill. Actresses are generally "Miss," and all the little ambition I have left makes for the distinction of Helen Bratton.'

'A theatrical life is full of temptation,' said Pepper Smith, looking uneasily at his wife.

'So is every other life,' she answered coolly. 'My own worst temptation came to me when I was living the highly respectable life of companion to a young lady in a refined Christian household.'

Pepper Smith slightly flushed as she quoted his own advertisement, but he spoke no word as he passed out of the room.

'You go too,' said Helen, pointing an imperious finger to the door. 'I feel a little tired, and must lie down for a few minutes before I begin to pack.'

Her eyes were on the pillow which a dead child's head had pressed, and I knew there was nothing for me to do but leave her alone.

She followed me to the door and locked it after me, and I, lingering outside, heard a sound that has echoed in my heart through all the after years.

Then, though I could not see her, I knew that the long-controlled storm of a strong woman's proud heart had burst on a dead child's pillow.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

I HAD been John Westropp's happy wife for ten years when I saw Helen again.

We had taken our two elder children to see *Little Lord Fauntleroy* at a London theatre, and I had not to refer to the programme for the name of the tall black-robed woman who played the part of the little lord's mother with such charming motherliness.

'Oh, what an awful nice mother!' exclaimed my boy Jack, with ungrammatical enthusiasm, at the end of the first act. 'I say, Sall, if we hadn't a mother of our own, wouldn't it be jolly to have one like that?'

My heart sickened for a moment with the pain of a never-entirely healed wound unconsciously touched by the boy who would not for worlds have hurt me. I remembered how the love of my first-born had been absorbed by the woman who was not his mother, and I tremblingly waited for my girl Sara's reply.

Sally is not generally considered a pretty child, but as she has her father's eyes, she is beautiful in

mine, and I thought the little face that flushed indignantly at her brother's question was like the face of an angel.

'No, indeed, Jack, I would not care for all the play mothers in the world if we had not our own real mother.'

As we were passing out of the crowded theatre a tall much-muffled woman suddenly appeared at my side, thrust a note into my hand, and then as suddenly disappeared. Instinctively knowing that the writer wished me to read it alone, I kept it unopened till I sat by the sleeping Jack that night.

The excitement of Jack's first play-going had a wakeful effect, and his desire to wake up those whom he patronisingly called 'the little ones' for the purpose of applauding his own performance of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' caused one of the many differences of opinion between him and Morgan that fortunately never altered their friendship.

Morgan, the true friend of my darker days, came to me at the beginning of my good years, having left her native Wales with the heroic resolve 'to die the old maid of the old mistress,' and during this particular visit to London she was, according to her own will and pleasure, in charge of the nursery department. On this particular night she declared her intention of using all her influence for the prevention of future play-going, 'if it was make the little boys foolish,' and regretted that Master Jack's parents did not value the wise Solomon's prescription for childish folly as it was valued in certain Welsh mountain homes.

I appeared on the scene just in time to prevent

Master Jack from saying anything impertinent about the Welsh mountains, or anything irreverent about Solomon's wisdom, and having presented an early morning performance of *Fauntleroy* to his consideration, induced him to sleep on the idea.

'That mother in the play is awful nice,' he muttered as his eyes closed. 'She is no end of an awful nice mother when the play is going on, but when it's all over a real mother is nicer than a play mother.'

Then, sitting alone by the sleeping boy, the real mother, who had pondered many things in her heart that night, read the letter of the play mother.

HELEN TO ROSAMUND—I am writing you a line before the last act of the play that most people think I play well. If you think I play it well, you will know what most people do not know, how it is that I, who never bore a child, can so well play a mother's part. You will know that all the motherly gush that goes out to the child in the play springs from the grave of a child who died all my own, though he was born yours. You have your living children. Do not grudge me the one dead lamb. I have seen you in your happiness to-night, but do not, if you can help it, let me see you again. The sight of you makes me feel wicked, and I would rather feel good. I am as content with my present line of life as I can ever be on earth, and if ever my thoughts turn towards heaven it is a little child who leads them.

Last summer we went to Ireland, and made a short sojourn at Castlerock.

Jack and Sally were not more impressed by the grandeur of the ancient city than their mother had been in the old time before them, and they failed to see why a building no finer than their own Devon-

shire village church should be called a cathedral when the great St. Paul's in London could be called nothing greater, but they explained to the little ones that Castlerock was in one way a more remarkable city than London because mother had once been a child there.

On the morning after our arrival, as we walked through the streets that were quiet on every day but a fair day to the quieter place that was the object of our long journey, I looked with interest at whatever old familiar names were still over shop doors, and among them I read the name of 'Malone' over a hardware shop.

The windows of the well-remembered room over that shop were open, and the sounds of school life were borne on the summer morning air into the quiet street.

'Pat Reilly,' said a voice unchanged by more than a score of years, 'come here till I give you a slap.'

Then followed a howl that assured me the unfortunate Pat was own son to my old school-fellow William Reilly, and proved Mr. Malone as strong to pandy the young offenders of this generation as he had been in the schooltime of their fathers.

Sally, leading about a little brother and sister in her little motherly way with her father, from whom she is never far apart in holiday times, hurried away from a sound that was to her appalling.

Jack lingered under the schoolroom windows, and listened with an interest apparently pleasurable.

'Jack,' I said, 'the schoolmaster up there was once going to slap your mother.'

Jack's face reddened under its summer tan as he

answered, with all the dignity of a boy in his first Eton jacket—

‘Take my arm, mother, and come along. It’s well for the old beast I wasn’t born then.’

In a few minutes we were all standing by another shop—a huckster’s shop—that looked the same as it had looked twenty-five years before, but with the name of Michael Murphy no longer over the door.

John Westropp raised his hat as he looked at the dwelling once hallowed by a life of unselfish love.

Jack, standing by his side, also uncovered his head, knowing why his father revered a huckster’s shop as a sacred place.

Then we passed on to the holy ground where Michael Murphy lay under the shadow of the Cross that had guided him through life.

This was the first time I had been able to fulfil my heart’s desire of looking with my children on Mick’s grave, but John had long ago been there to raise the white marble cross to the memory of the man who had died for me.

The children to whom my dear Mick was a very real uncle were laden with flowers carefully grown in their English garden for the decoration of this Irish grave, and as they planted them beneath the cross I wondered if their labour of love was known to him on whose dead heart a white flower had withered more than twenty years ago.

The marble cross in the Irish churchyard is not the only monument to Michael Murphy’s memory.

One day, years ago, Pepper Smith, whose sympathy with what was nearest my heart no longer

surprised me, spoke of the money Mick had left me when I was ten years old.

‘That ought to be paid back with interest,’ he said.

And I, understanding him, answered—

‘It can be paid back in the way Mick would like best, by some good work for the fatherless and the motherless.’

We were walking together through the Devonshire village near my home when Pepper Smith stopped before a pleasant homely house standing in a large garden gay with flowers and rich in fruit.

Its owner, the village doctor, having lately inherited a small fortune, and built an imitation Queen Anne villa for the good pleasure of his æsthetic daughters, was about to remove reluctantly from the old home, whose homeliness was dear to a soul not yet educated beyond a preference for genuine Queen Victoria.

‘If you think it would be suitable for an orphanage,’ said Pepper Smith, ‘I will buy it, and make a perpetual provision for the support and education of seven penniless orphan girls from seven to seventeen years of age. Seven at a time, with the necessary teachers, would be just about the right number of children for a house of this size, and under the care of a motherly matron they could lead the real family life that is impossible in large institutions. I believe Dr. Vale brought up a large family here, and I am told they were a remarkably healthy lot of children.’

‘It is quite a child’s paradise,’ I cried delightedly, looking round the garden where there was so much that was pleasant to the eyes and good for food, and

remembering my own childish delight at the sight of my grandmother's Dublin garden that was not to be compared with this Devonshire Eden. 'Oh, how happy the children will be, and how they will love you for giving them such a home!'

'I am not to be named in connection with this matter,' said Pepper Smith, with his old peremptory air. 'When this house is bought let it be called "The Michael Murphy Orphanage."'

'If you don't mind,' I said, 'I would rather have it called "The Uncle Mick Home."'

'Very good,' said Pepper Smith, with the old approving nod. 'Call it "The Uncle Mick Home," and if the children are happy here, let them learn to thank Uncle Mick for their happiness.'

So it has come to pass that the pleasant Devonshire house is a true home to many once homeless children, who have been taught to trace all the happiness of their healthy country life to a poor Irishman's love for one little orphan child.

'Sall,' I heard Jack say to his sister one holiday afternoon after a merry apple-gathering, 'what a jolly lot of cousins we shall have at the end of the world.'

When the Uncle Mick Home was first opened Jack and Sally decided that all the children sheltered there must be their cousins.

'This place may not last so long as to the end of the world,' said the more thoughtful Sally, 'but at all events, Uncle Mick will have a great many to love him in Heaven, and I think when he sees them all he will be glad he died for mother's sake when she was a child.'

'I don't know about Heaven,' said Jack, who is not more spiritually-minded than the average boy of the period, 'and I don't see how any fellow can think it a jolly thing to die ; but I'll tell you one thing, Sall, whenever I want to be selfish or greedy, or that sort of thing, I think of Uncle Mick, and I try as hard as I can not to be a beast.'

I said nothing, but I silently rejoiced in the thought that these, my children, had each in a different way taken to heart the true lesson of Michael Murphy's life and death.

The house of which John Westropp made me mistress a dozen years ago is not one of the stately homes of England, but it is one of the most comfortable homes in Devonshire, which means a great deal to those who put comfort before state.

Here Eugene's father, who has long been to me as my own, spends the greater part of the time that we do not spend with him in London.

His once broken friendship with John Westropp is now unbreakably cemented, and our children are dear to him. Jack is specially near Pepper Smith's heart, and the boy's likeness to him is considered as remarkable as the affection that exists between the two.

'Yes, the boy is like me, and we are fond of each other,' Pepper Smith is wont to say to people who comment on the likeness and the affection. 'The likeness comes from his great-grandfather, Bartholomew Smith of Northport, who was my father's first cousin, and the Smiths of Northport were always remarkable for family affection.'

Pepper Smith's beard is all white now, but his face, no longer furrowed with the marks of an unbearable sorrow, seems to have grown younger rather than older through the years which have followed his relief from the heaviest weight of that sorrow.

'Hope makes the heart whole,' he said one day, talking as he talks to me alone.

And I, knowing what was in the heart of Eugene's father, felt my own deeply moved by the thought that his now strong life had been healed by the hope that could only be realised beyond the gate of death.

Pepper Smith is no longer a Manchester warehouseman. He disposed of the warehouse many years ago, and has since devoted his undoubted business talents to the use of clerical and other philanthropists, who find his clear head as helpful as his open hand.

He declares that John Westropp's help in his philanthropic work is as valuable as were his former services in the Manchester warehouse, and when John leaves London he is missed by more than his old employer.

'What is to hinder you from living in town and devoting yourself entirely to the service of humanity?' the said John was asked one day by a restless regenerator of London slums.

'Well, nothing but the trifling consideration of a few human beings down in the country,' he answered, with the patriarchal smile that always lights up his still beautiful eyes as he thinks of the farmers and cottagers who call him Squire.

'Right, John,' said Pepper Smith, 'the duty

that lies nearest is your duty as a landed proprietor.'

The words were spoken in the old Uncle Pepper tone, but that tone no longer irritates me as in the days of old, and my peace of mind is not disturbed as it once might have been by my kinsman's desire to show off his former manager as a landed proprietor.

Love for the individual makes all the difference in one's view of the marks of individuality, and in the light of present affection my former objection to Pepper Smith's peculiarities has passed away.

The sympathy that is born of love has long ago taught me to sound the depths of true humility through which the seemingly arrogant man has passed, and I now rejoice in the uplifted head and assertive voice as welcome signs of a restoration to the self-respect that is as the breath of life to a Smith of Northport.

'When I am a millionaire,' says John, 'I will build a convalescent home for governesses in genteel boarding schools.'

'Do not put off your good works till the millennium,' I advise, 'but go on with your holy war against literary swindles.'

'By Jove, yes,' he cries, making a frantic rush at the foolscap on which he is delivering his soul of an article on bogus publishing companies that will, I am sure, meet the approval of Mr. Walter Besant.

At this moment Pepper Smith enters the room with a newspaper in his hand and a look in his eyes that causes John to lay down his pen, and me to leave the two men to themselves.

Pepper Smith's untiring labours in the service of humanity have gained him high respect in the clerical society, for which he has the old weakness, but he takes no clergyman and only one layman into his confidence about the work nearest to his own heart.

Whether together or apart, Pepper Smith and John Westropp carefully read the newspaper reports of criminal trials, and thoughtfully consider the claims of certain prisoners to the compassion of one who was once in prison.

No time or trouble is spared in the investigation of such cases, and when it is clearly proved that the shadow of a prison threatens to darken the whole future of a man who only wants a fair chance to fight the battle of life honestly, money is cheerfully given for the building up of a ruined home trade or the purchase of a colonial farm.

But to the released prisoner, who finds friendly help waiting for him at the prison door, the name of Pepper Smith, the London philanthropist, has no particular meaning.

For the money that means new life and hope is always given in the name of John Darker.

THE END

NEW NOVELS.

6s.

MARGARET DRUMMOND. By SOPHIE F. F. VEITCH.

PAUL ROMER . . . By CARRIE HARGREAVES.

3s. 6d.

THE CURB OF HONOUR By M. BETHAM-EDWARDS.

BORN IN EXILE . . . By GEORGE GISSING.

THE GREAT CHIN
EPISODE . . . By PAUL CUSHING.

THE LAST TOUCHES . . . By Mrs. W. K. CLIFFORD.

ALADDIN IN LONDON . . . By FERGUS HUME.

A TANGLED WEB . . . By Lady LINDSAY.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S
WINDOW . . . By Lady LINDSAY.

CAP AND GOWN
COMEDY . . . By ASCOTT R. HOPE.

2s. 6d.

UNDER TWO SKIES . . . By E. W. HORNUNG.

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK,
SOHO SQUARE, LONDON.

The Dryburgh Edition

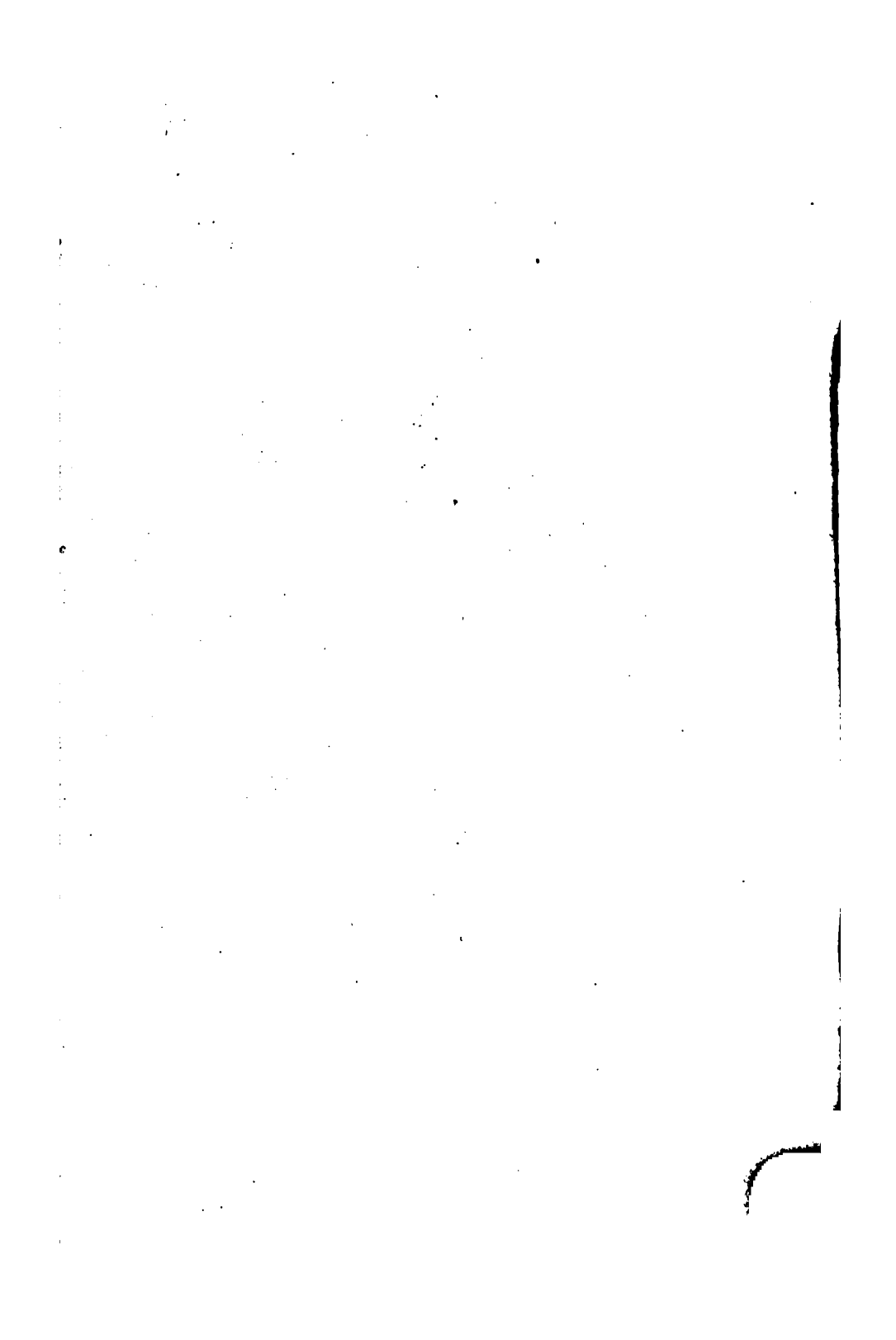
OF THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.

*With 250 Page Illustrations, specially Drawn for this Edition by the well-known Artists whose names are given below, and engraved on wood by Mr. J. D. COOPER. In Twenty-five Volumes.
Crown 8vo, cloth. Price 5s. each.*

CHARLES GREEN	.	.	WAVERLEY.
GORDON BROWNE	.	.	GUY MANNERING.
PAUL HARDY	.	.	THE ANTIQUARY.
LOCKHART BOGLE	.	.	ROB ROY.
WALTER PAGET	.	.	BLACK DWARF.
LOCKHART BOGLE	.	.	LEGEND OF MONTROSE.
FRANK DADD, R.I.	.	.	OLD MORTALITY.
WILLIAM HOLE, R.S.A.	.	.	HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN.
JOHN WILLIAMSON	.	.	BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR.
GORDON BROWNE	.	.	IVANHOE.
JOHN WILLIAMSON	.	.	THE MONASTERY.
JOHN WILLIAMSON	.	.	THE ABBOT.
H. M. PAGET	.	.	KENILWORTH.
W. H. OVEREND	.	.	THE PIRATE.
GODFREY C. HINDLEY	.	.	FORTUNES OF NIGEL.
STANLEY BERKELEY	.	.	PEVERIL OF THE PEAK.
H. M. PAGET	.	.	QUENTIN DURWARD.
HUGH THOMSON	.	.	ST. RONAN'S WELL.
GEORGE HAY, R.S.A.	.	.	REDGAUNTLET.
GODFREY C. HINDLEY	.	.	THE BETROTHED.
	.	.	HIGHLAND WIDOW.
GODFREY C. HINDLEY	.	.	THE TALISMAN.
STANLEY BERKELEY	.	.	WOODSTOCK.
C. M. HARDIE, A.R.S.A.	.	.	FAIR MAID OF PERTH.
PAUL HARDY	.	.	ANNE OF GEIERSTEIN.
GORDON BROWNE	.	.	COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS.
PAUL HARDY	.	.	THE SURGEON'S DAUGHTER.
WALTER PAGET	.	.	CASTLE DANGEROUS.

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK,
SOHO SQUARE, LONDON.

158



**NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**is under no circumstances
taken from the Building**

1

